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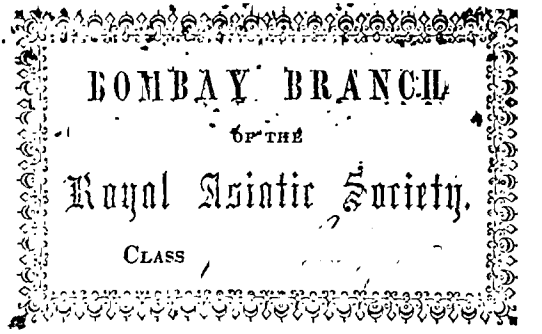

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THE

RESTORATION OF BELIEF.

THE

RESTORATION OF BELIEF

BY

ISAAC TAYLOR.

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—— "*Suis illa* (RELIGIO CHRISTIANA) *contenta est viribus, et veritatis propriæ fundaminibus nititur: nec spoliatur vi sua, etiamsi nullum habeat vindicem: immo si linguæ omnes contrafaciant, contraque nitantur, et ad fidem illius abrogandam consensionis unitæ animositate conspirent.*" ARNOBIUS.

A New Edition,

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NOTICE TO THE PRESENT EDITION.

IN offering to the Public a new edition of this Volume, the Author has carefully revised it throughout; and in doing so he has expunged passages which, if proper at the time of its first appearance, might now seem to be less so.

In place of these omitted paragraphs he has subjoined a section, in which he has briefly commented upon the recent *Vie de Jésus* of M. ERNEST RÉNAN.

STANFORD RIVERS,

January 1, 1864.

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THE RESTORATION OF BELIEF.

. . . . Our conversations of late have opened interminable questions, on the right hand and on the left; but hitherto have not brought us to a conclusion on any one subject. There has always been a common ground whence we might take our start, and we have been able to keep company some way on the road; but soon the one or the other has gone off, drawing the argument after him, toward some wholly new region.

You will recall instances of this sort of wandering, which, while it has seemed to violate logical rules, has—so we have felt it—obeyed the call of a moral necessity. The chance of the hour may have given us our first impulse; but a law of thought not to be resisted, has carried us forward from that point toward an unknown centre where all thought converges. The Newspaper may have given rise to discussions, touching the condition of the labouring classes—manufacturing or rural; thence onward we have gone till we found ourselves encircled by those abstruse questions, in approaching which the depths of Theology were in front of us. We may have debated the principles of Taxation; but thence a path has opened itself into the subject of the moral obligations of governments towards the people; and

thence onward again toward the problem of religious establishments. We may have incidentally mentioned some point of Biblical criticism, and have gone on toward subjects, not unconnected indeed therewith, but of far greater importance than can belong to any merely critical question.

In a word, in coming upon what one might call surface questions, it has always appeared that an interior beneath was to be first explored. Or if the interior were brought under discussion, its results and issues have carried us toward the fields of practical science.

We must not impute this incessant wandering to ourselves altogether as a fault. If in these instances we had been less desultory, and more logical, we should have paid respect to the forms of argumentation, only in proportion as we had disregarded those relationships that are more real, and that now are felt to be so by all men.

This circuit-going in all directions, at what point soever either serious controversy or incidental conversation takes its start, is the marked feature of the times present; and it has, as I think, not only a deep meaning, but it has a good—or as we say—an auspicious meaning. Conversation among intelligent men, as well as the literature of the day, shows the same tendency; and as we cannot fail to notice it, we should not fail to gather its import. Is it not just now as if an invisible tyranny were driving the minds of men onward and onward, or in perpetual circuits, until they shall have become spent in fruitless courses over the unenclosed wilds of speculation?

If you ask what this discursiveness means, and what will be its end—I think it shows that at length a true step forward toward a better understanding—at least among the educated classes of the community—has actually been taken; and that we, and some of those from whom we most differ, have by this time gone forward on a road which it will not be necessary hereafter for ourselves, or for our successors, to retrace. To look abroad upon the world of opinion, in this country or elsewhere, what one sees might seem to resemble the hurrying hither and thither of the sparks upon a burned paper; all which sparks, bright as they are, are soon to find their rest in ashes and blackness. Yet it is not so, I think, in the social system; for *here* the sparks are showing a tendency in one and the same direction; or—like the falling stars of an autumnal sky—they all give notice of their bearing upon great planetary movements.

You will be told by some—and they are men whose judgment entitles them to be listened to—that they have heretofore seen the end of movements not less promising than this to which now we are linked, and that no notable result, or none in which we could rejoice, has marked the return of men's minds to their customary acquiescent inaction.

I must however continue to be hopeful so long as I see a ground of expectation that what is bright is at hand. It has come to be felt and to be acknowledged too, that TRUTH, in relation to any particular subject which touches immediately or remotely the well-being of men—either the individual man, or the social—must

be only one portion, or one aspect, of UNIVERSAL TRUTH; and that if we would secure ourselves against mistakes and illusions as to that particular subject, whatever it may be, we must know, not merely the whole of itself, but what it borders upon; and then the bordering of those remoter neighbours, one upon another, and so must we advance, onward and round about, until we have fairly made the circuit of all things; or of all things which it is granted to man to measure and compass.

This feeling—this acknowledgment—in professing which all are agreed, runs parallel with the axiom of Natural Philosophy, namely, that there are no insulated sciences; but that all investigations of nature, and all paths followed in the abstract sciences, tend toward a centre, and are only so many separate contributions toward a system which will at length present itself as a harmony, and which will then assign to its place every item of that knowledge which we shall have made our own, concerning the Material Universe.

The perception we have acquired concerning the interrelation and dependence, one upon another, of moral, religious, and political questions, has not been borrowed from the Physical Sciences; nor is it an inference that has been carried over from one side of philosophy to the other: for although, in its rise, it has been contemporaneous, it has had its own source, springing up from within the world of speculation. It is a feeling that has flowed from a far deeper mode of thinking than has hitherto prevailed on such subjects; and it has shown

the presence of a serious desire, or—one might say—an impatience—almost an agony, impelling men to reach, if it be possible, a solid ground of belief.

It is inevitable that this feeling should drive men in from the surface of all subjects, and compel them to dig until, from all sides, they have come to encounter each other, working in the same shafts, and pursuing the same seams of thought. These underground encounters, startling as they are when they bring those who are declared adversaries above ground—face to face in the mine, and so near to the very pith of the world, may lead to a common understanding, and to a belief generally, if not universally assented to, and to a CONCLUSION, once for all arrived at, and which thenceforward will be brought to bear upon every practical question that may seem to stand related to it in morals, politics, and education, as well as Religion.

We have not, however, as yet, advanced quite abreast on the two high roads of Philosophy—the physical and the intellectual, or moral; for on the former a rule is well understood and universally obeyed, which on the latter is but dimly seen, or is perpetually broken.

What I mean is this—that in all departments of the physical sciences, both abstract and applicate, and on all fields of learned industry, every inquirer, and every collector of facts, is left to pursue his path in his own mode, and is held to be exempt from interference on the part of others; as if what one had learned could supersede, or might interdict the inquiries of another. Although, in the issue, there will be ONE PHILOSOPHY, and although there should be fellowship among the labourers,

none are to put bars across the paths of their companions. This sort of interference, as it would be groundless, so must it be fruitless in the end; and meantime it would be mischievous; nor is it often attempted in the world of physical science.

So much as this cannot be alleged in behalf of those branches of philosophy which touch human nature more intimately. On this ground attempts are often made to intercept the progress of inquiry in some one direction, as if it might disturb what has been ascertained in another. Too often—and here we are all more or less in fault—we carry inferences over from one field to another; or we are in too great haste so to do; for undoubtedly, in the end, all inferences, all deductions, will join on, one to another.

Let me state the case in some such way as that in which it now often meets us. Let us suppose that I am addicted to antiquarianism—to historical criticism—to ethnological philology, or to kindred subjects. You perhaps are conversant with political economy, and the social interests it involves. Now I may have convinced myself, in my own modes of inquiry, that things are so and so; or that the transactions of remote ages have been truthfully reported. You ought not then to come in with a supercilious air and tell me that I may as well spare myself so much learned toil, for that you, in your department, have ascertained, beyond doubt, that I have been deceiving myself, and am blindly misleading others. This is not a scientific procedure; it is an outrage committed upon the commons of Philosophy. If you say you do but retaliate, I reply, I will take care to give you no

cause of offence in this way in future; and I shall also disregard any such interferences on your part.

It is easy to foresee what those occasions are in which I am likely to claim protection under the shield of this rule of our modern philosophy. The rule itself is a main article in the Magna Charta of our intellectual liberties, and whoever infringes these privileges forfeits his claim to be much listened to, even on his own ground.

I do not say that we, on our side—I mean the side of Religious Belief—have not in any instances been blameworthy in this same manner—all parties have been persecutors in their time: but I think it may be shown that acts of attempted interference, as well as argumentative intolerance, have of late been frequent on the other side in a larger proportion. Too often, we, on our side, have cowered before the unseemly bearing of those who have assailed us. If there has been *any* of this giving ground, it is more than was due; and it is now time that we should repel all such violences. When I say *repel*, I mean —that we should not yield an inch to those who offend against the acknowledged maxims of what may be called, philosophical courtesy.

Not only, on my side, would I abstain from the language of intimidation or of interdiction—not only *not* say, 'you must not approach this or that subject, for the ground is sacred;' but rather would invite every one to follow up his own course of inquiry in the mode that best suits himself. If he does so in a manner that is unseemly, flippant, inconclusive; or if he so writes and speaks as to betray an arrogant and captious temper, in doing so he provides against himself a most effective sort

of reply, and I need give myself no trouble on his behalf.

As to what is written or spoken ingenuously and sincerely, or as we say, 'in good faith,' although it be with the avowed intention of loosening, or subverting Religious Belief, I will never call the author of such utterances my enemy. So firm is my own belief, that I can well afford to be thus charitable—nay, more: although, in regard to the immediate welfare of many, I must deeply deplore what I see to be taking place around me, I have a perfect confidence in the issue, after a time, of the intellectual movement which is in progress, so far as it is impelled by those who are honestly intended. If not everywhere, yet in this country, such a restoration of Religious Belief as could not have resulted from any other conjunction of causes, will be its consequence.

In what I now propose to do there is included no intention to take in hand any recent book or books, as if to give it, or them, an answer: this would be to enter upon an endless and unavailing labour. I am not ignorant of what has lately been written; but I shall pursue my own track of thought in my own mode, and leave others to do the like in theirs.

If I think or speak of any man as an ADVERSARY, I do so in a sense that is purely logical; and I do not allow the word to bring with it any of those feelings with which, in fact, I regard the *principles* he may endeavour to establish. These principles I utterly condemn, and the influence he has acquired over the minds of others I would gladly destroy; but toward himself I harbour no unkindly sentiment: how should I do so when I think of

him as struggling, without help or hope, in the grasp of perplexities with which every seriously-minded man has had to contend, at some stage of his course; or with which he does still contend in times of mental lassitude. Those who have suffered no anguish in their past history, and who have passed through no conflicts, are men (enviable perhaps! but) with whom neither my adversary nor myself should have nearly so much sympathy as we should with each other.

It is much to be wished that those who at this moment are assailing Religious Belief would deny themselves the poor and cheap gratification, in which they almost all of them give themselves free leave to indulge, that of calling the adherents and advocates of Belief—'enthusiasts,' or 'fanatics.'

And yet, perhaps, this seemingly arrogant practice should be pardoned in those who are guilty of it, inasmuch as it may not so much spring from an intolerant temper, or personal malignity, as from the felt necessity of the position in which they, on that side, have placed themselves: for if, indeed, those whose belief these writers assail are not 'fanatics;' and if, on the contrary, they, or many of them, are as well informed and as highly cultured and as capable of reasoning as themselves, and if they are equally serious and honest, and if, in a word, they are every way as 'good men,' and yet are BELIEVERS, then is Belief proved to be reasonable; for reasonable men profess it; and so the contrary assumption falls to the ground; and then is Belief that conclusion which will be accepted and rested in, after full inquiry, by the great majority of minds that are in a sound

state. So it will be—those seasons of reaction excepted, like the present, in which a revulsion is taking place, and which is attributable to obvious causes.

Whoever calls me a fanatic, simply because I believe, puts into my hand a lever by means of which I shall upheave his stronghold.

WHERE BEST THE CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT MAY BE CARRIED FORWARD.

GREAT arguments, we have said, cannot be long held apart, or permanently disjoined. As this is true in natural philosophy, so is it true in whatever touches human nature and the welfare of man, morally or religiously considered. It is not always easy to dissever even questions of politics from religious principles; for through the medium either of what concerns Religious Establishments, or Religious Liberty, or Public Education, the one set of principles interlocks itself with the other.

Of some of these lines of argument it may be said that they possess an inherent logical title to precedence—they present themselves as *first* to be disposed of in the order of dialectic sequence. In behalf of some weighty questions it may be pretended that, if determined in a certain mode, they bring all other argumentation, all balancing of probabilities, all inquiries concerning possible improvements or progress, to a dead stop; they throw a pall over the world, and over its fruitless agitations.

Again, there are questions affecting the welfare of classes which cry for instant consideration, if, indeed,

hearts of flesh beat in our bosoms. Of what account are theories, or principles of any sort, when placed in comparison with some practical measure, tending to assuage physical suffering, or to gladden the homes of thousands of our fellow-men? Such pleas are good; but they need not overrule our present purpose. Let every one take to the path that best suits himself.

If a preference be given to subjects which affect the welfare—not of classes of men, but of men universally, we may then make our choice in adopting one of two methods—the first of which might be called the GERMAN, and the other the ENGLISH mode.

The German mind inclines to begin at the beginning, rather than to seize a main point midway, or to catch it in its concrete form. Whatever the German mind has to do with, although it be a surface question, it takes a preliminary plunge among profound abstractions. A metaphysical, much rather than a scientific, law of thought prevails with it; and thus the simplest adjustment of things about us must show reason, as related to some theory of the universe, which, perhaps, has scarcely yet fledged itself, as newly broken forth from chaos.

It is not so with the English mind, which has more inclination toward the concrete than the abstract. At least we must say it seeks the practical—it loves whatever is well-defined and certain, nor does it hesitate to accept and to use what is sure and at hand, although much room may still be left for argument on the *à priori* side.

In the present instance, then, I must make my choice of a preliminary subject in compliance with the habits and tendency of the English mind.

At this time, when everything is brought into doubt, if there be in sight a path that is open and straight before us—if there be, on any side, ground that feels firm to the foot—if, near at hand, there are objects that are palpable—if around us we may see what we have known to be good, and which is our own—then upon such a path will we set forward, and upon such ground will we first essay to tread, and such objects will we grasp, and to such possessions will we assert our right. Thence, and from such ground, will we adventure forward and outward, toward the dark unknown.

I shall here perhaps be stopped by an exception taken against any renewal of the endeavour to link Religion to History, or to send us back for our faith and morals to past ages. Nevertheless I *must* do so from the very necessity of the case. BELIEF and HISTORY God has conjoined, nor shall man, to the end of time, succeed in effecting a divorce. Religion, disjoined from History, is a flickering candle, held in the hand of one who looks back upon utter darkness behind him, and who looks into the blackness of darkness in front of him.

But beside this inherent necessity of the case, there meets us an incidental necessity for taking the same course, and for travelling back to ages past. Even if Belief and History were not thus wedded, DISBELIEF takes an equally firm hold upon antiquity. In every form of it, it has its ancestry, and it must not now ask to be spoken to as if we had not already, and long ago, made acquaintance with it.

Is it, indeed, to be reckoned as a fault, or is it a disqualification for engaging in argument, to have become,

in some degree, conversant with the fortunes of man in past time? If not, then this species of accomplishment brings with it an irresistible feeling, prompting one to see and to recognise, in what is recent, the very counterpart of what is of remote origin.

It is not merely this—that the objections which have been of late urged against Christianity—against the Old Testament Books, and the New, are substantially the same as those which Origen and the early Apologists encountered and refuted. This is not all; for those deeper speculations—more formidable in aspect, as they are, which just now are presented as the ripened fruits of the mature human mind, which at length is freeing itself from its thraldom of centuries—these same speculations, fresh complexioned as they seem, differ in little, beside their wording, from the profundities of the Oriental and the Alexandrine philosophy, as it was uttered and edited by the several schools of Gnostics, Manichees, and others. If then Belief carries us back to antiquity, so does Misbelief; and we cannot refuse to follow a double guidance that is peremptory in both instances.

As a proper introduction, therefore, to any argument that touches the philosophy of human nature, or that implicates what is abstruse in theology, I must essay to tread upon the solid ground of history as far forward as it offers itself to the foot. History *is* solid ground; or, to exclude exceptions, let us say that, within the region it professes to embrace, solid ground is discoverable in all directions. This is manifestly the case when certain historic positions are brought into comparison, as to their demonstrative value, with any assumed principles of ab-

stract science (not mathematical). As thus:—It is certain that the Normans brought the Saxons under their sway in the eleventh century; but it is questionable whether a chivalrous race will always succeed in vanquishing an agricultural and a trading people. It is certain that Augustus established and consolidated a despotism upon the ruins of that republic, in the attempt to maintain which Brutus pointed his sword against Cæsar, and in despair of restoring which he fell upon it himself. But it may be doubted whether a republican government, such as that of ancient Rome, will necessarily find its end and issue in the hands of an autocrat. It is more certain that Socrates swallowed hemlock by the vote of his fellow-citizens, than it is that a people, like the Athenians of that age, must have been taught to listen to and admire Plato, before they could tolerate teaching, such as that of Socrates.

But now, although matters of history do possess this absolute and this comparative certainty when placed beside abstract principles, and although it be true that no inferences from those principles can ever be admitted to abate a jot of the certainty of what *is* certain in history, this relative value of the two species of evidence will not be seen by all minds alike. On the contrary, some minds from want of culture, or some from an irresistible propensity toward paradox, and some from a vague and dreamy unfixedness of temper, will always fly off from the better evidence, and will betake themselves to the worse.

With many, the most misty abstractions which look well at a distance will always be eagerly pursued: while

matters of fact, although irresistibly evident, are scouted or forgotten. Culture has much to do with that faculty of the understanding on which history lays a firm hold. Apart from a certain amount of culture, we do not find that history—as a reality past—comes home to the intellectual consciousness. Hence springs a disadvantage attaching, in the nature of things, to the labours of those who aim to impart an historic belief to the masses of the people, in the way of *definite proof*. The process finds a quality wanting in those who are the subjects of it: hence too, of course, arises that poor advantage which is snatched at by those whose aim it is to loosen the same historic belief from the minds of these classes.

There is no arrogance in what is here alleged. Every educated man, whether he be preacher, or lecturer, or teacher, in any line—scientific, literary, or professional—well knows that, even when he has done his utmost, it is but a fragment of his own vivid perception of the subject that he can lodge in the reason and the imagination of imperfectly instructed hearers. Therefore will it always be an easy task, in dealing with such, to dislodge materials that have no cement, and to strew the ground with the ruins of a structure that has not settled down on its foundations, and which has no coherence. Because it is so easy to do this, writers who are impatient to win notoriety, and who would fain be followed by troops of disciples, address themselves, without scruple, to those whose consent, when they have obtained it, has no value; and whose plaudits should make a wise man blush.

In all departments of knowledge it is the RESULTS

that are for the many; while the PROCESS through which results have been reached, are for the few. Especially must it be so in the departments of history and criticism. Results may easily be rendered into the vernacular; and when thus translated, they become public property. But processes of inquiry are carried forward in symbol, and these signs imply that a knowledge is already possessed, ten times out-measuring that to which the bare symbol can give expression. Persons imperfectly educated suffer no real damage on this ground, so long as they are not tampered with by sophists. In a country where the Press, the Pulpit, the Platform, the Class-room, are quite free, popular incompetency, as to matters of science or of learning, as it cannot be much abused by the privileged, so should it not be wrought upon, nor flattered, nor cajoled by ambitious declaimers.

There is a ripened condition of the faculties—there is a state of plenary consciousness toward the things, the persons, the events of past time, which is the fruit of high culture and of life-long habits. This consciousness—this mental existence, carried back into the heart of antiquity, supersedes what, in a logical sense, might be required in the way of Evidences and Proof.

A man sits surrounded with the books of all ages, among which he has passed the best years of his life. He has gone in and out among them: he has made a path for himself through their very substance in the course of methodical study; and with these he has conversed, discursively, as accident might lead him. Now let us imagine that these his companions are set out in chronological perspective on his tables—right and left,

each according to its date. Thus placed, they are so many candles lit, shedding their beams over the expanse of centuries, up to the remotest eras. It is true that many deep shadows still rest upon spots and spaces of this landscape; nevertheless, wherever the light *does* fall, the outlines of things are perfectly defined, and the colours are bright.

Besides, as the books are, in a sense, phosphorescent in the view of their possessor, so are the multifarious contents of the cabinets around him:—so are the antique busts that occupy the brackets: and, 'as face answereth to face in a glass,' so do the visages and the legends of medallions and of sculptures answer to, and interpret, and sustain, the pages of the historians, the poets, the philosophers, of the corresponding times. Taken altogether, or when considered in their aggregate effect, these accumulated materials give a familiarity and an assurance to the historic consciousness which does not rate lower than does the feeling as to any class of objects that are not actually present to the senses.

Yet how much of this feeling will it be possible for this man of culture to impart to one whose education has been elementary only? Not a thousandth part of it; and if the recipient of such a communication, along with an ordinary measure of native intelligence, should bring with him a smack of conceit, and if, in his case, ignorance, instead of being simply negative, has gone into the positive form of a shrewd scepticism, then the bringing forward what he will call 'book-evidence,' and antiquarian corroborations, may be found to have produced on him the very contrary of their proper effect.

This man, who is one 'not soon imposed upon,' had come forward apprehensive that he should perhaps be robbed forcibly of his disbelief; but instead of this, he has seen and heard nothing that he has really understood; and he departs—with his reason confused, and his vanity entire.

What then is the inference hence resulting? It is just this—that knowing these things, the well-informed, the honestly-intending, the seriously-minded, should scorn the easy triumph of trampling upon the Religious Belief of the people—the uneducated and the half educated.

Do I say this because I inwardly mistrust my argument, and therefore shrink from the light, and foresee what must be the issue of an open discussion? I shall show you that any such surmise as this, on your part, if you have entertained it, is wholly unfounded. What I shrink from is not light, but darkness; what I am afraid of is not the brightness of day and the fresh breezes of the upper skies;—what I am afraid of is that choke-damp of popular ignorance, into which the assailants of Religious Belief shall not tempt me to descend in pursuit of them.

Besides, to follow severally, those who of late have assailed the Christian Belief of the mass of the people, in the way of reply, would be, on our part, to descend from our true position, and implicitly to give way to an utterly false idea of Christianity itself. We should thus come to think of it as a something artificial and fragile, which might be destroyed by bringing forward objections, difficulties, flaws on its surface—this and that—ten, twenty, or a hundred doubts. We should then feel as if

Christianity were a casting of that sort (as founders say) in which such a condition of internal tension by unequal cooling—such a strain upon the interior coherence of particles has come about, that, if you do but scratch the surface with a nail, or break off a corner, the whole flies into atoms.

This is very much the feeling with which one rises from the perusal of books, not merely those written to impugn Christianity, but sometimes, of books written to defend it. Any such idea of the matter in hand is wholly a mistaken notion. The anxiety that springs from it, and which disturbs the minds of those who do believe, or who would fain continue to believe, is quite groundless; under the influence of it one says, in a desponding tone—What if this or that difficulty cannot be cleared up? And there are twenty more in reserve! How can we hope to cut our way out from this jungle?

It is a commendable labour with which those charge themselves who sit down to meet and obviate objections *seriatim*—to reconcile inconsistencies—real or apparent—to harmonize discrepant narratives, and to draw the line around a difficulty, so as to reduce it to its minimum of importance. All this should be done; but it is better done in books devoted to philological and historical criticism, and in which questions are treated according to their intrinsic merits and their real import, apart from any allusion to what is irrelevant or disingenuous in the writings of opponents. But as to Christianity itself, those who think that it may be brought into doubt, or that it will be exposed to peril by means of cavils *in detail*, or by the allegation of difficulties that

defy solution, such persons—whether notions of this sort inspire them with the hope of a triumph for infidelity, or depress them with fear as believers, can never have understood what this Gospel is in itself, or what it intends, or how it stands related to human nature, and to the well-being of nations, or to the destinies of the human family. Such persons, whether they be overweening disbelievers, or timid and mistrusting believers, are burrowing hither and thither under the sward, unconscious of what may be seen and felt in the open world.

No problem, historical or critical, presenting itself for solution, should be negligently dealt with, or timidly evaded; much less should it be disingenuously smothered, or conjured out of the way. Difficulties and objections thus disposed of, are so much gunpowder, stowed away by our own hands, beneath the foundations of the house we live in.

What I propose to do in the following pages is not to wrestle with gainsayers, sincere or insincere, on low levels; nor to tread anew a ground that has already been trodden hard. Work of this sort has been well done; and no one who, in a spirit of industry and honesty, would inform himself concerning the 'Evidences of Christianity,'—the 'authenticity and genuineness of the Gospels and Epistles,' or any kindred subjects, need be at a loss in finding books, learnedly and conclusively written, where he may meet with more than enough of proof and argument to satisfy every seriously-minded and educated reader.

Nevertheless it is true that even such readers do rise

from the perusal of these books, confusedly convinced, and not fairly or finally rid of their misgivings. It is to them as if Infidelity had been mortally wounded, and lay at their feet as dead; but the carcase has not been removed or buried out of their sight, and they eye it with dread, as expecting its resurrection. They have concerned themselves with negations: they have carried their eye too close to the object before them: they have failed to come into correspondence with what is POSITIVE in the Gospel: they have lost, or not yet acquired, sympathy with that in it which, to those who occupy a better position, is seen to be great, and is felt to be true, and is found to be real.

So far as at this time a Restoration of Belief may be looked for as probable, either in single instances, or as to the community, it will be brought about, not by conflict or compromise with negations or exceptions, not by forcing a path through the briars of doubt; but by pushing our way straight forward toward the POSITIVE, and by apprehending, so far as the finite may do it, the INFINITE.

A RESTORATION of BELIEF, whether we think of it as an argumentative and logical process, or as a change of disposition produced by suasive and moral means, demands conditions thereto favourable. And it may be affirmed that it is in this country, rather than anywhere else, that these requisites are to be found in full measure. It is within the circuit of the British islands that every reasonable exception against the *conclusiveness* of an argument concerning Christianity is taken out of the way, as if a fair hearing of the adverse part had not been allowed. But might we claim a fifth, or even a seventh

part of Christendom, as if it could afford open ground for such a purpose? Barely so. It is true that wherever there has survived any knowledge of the Gospel, and where a glimmer of the light of heaven still shines, there might be found sincere men, enough to make up a Church in Tertullian's sense, 'Ubi tres, ibi Ecclesia.' But these exceptive cases in the sight of Heaven are of little account as to our immediate purpose, for we are not attempting to number the Faithful among the living, but are in search of a field that is adapted to movements on a large scale. Little can be said of nations that have not actually in their hands, generally, and who have not become conversant with, THE BOOK, concerning the authority of which this argument is to be had.

It may be affirmed that Christianity, considered as a system of religious and moral principles, is of such a nature that it will be sure to find its way toward that one community, within the circle of civilization, which, by national temperament, is the most energetic, which the most instinctively embraces doctrines that are seen to be practically good, and which makes its election, in matters of opinion, with the most absolute freedom—a freedom uncontrollably impatient of restraint or interference. Christianity chooses for itself a people that is pre-eminently spontaneous—self-governing, and in an equal degree regardful of order; and abhorrent of despotism, and if silent or acquiescent, is so much rather from a consciousness of individual independence, than from servility or fear. Such is the people (as compared with others) to the hearth of which Christ's religion has at length drawn itself, as if retiring to its own

home. Among such a people, when hunted from other lands, has this religion been welcomed, and here has it found its asylum.

In looking at the same facts in their other aspect, we should think of Christianity as that plastic power which, in the course of many centuries, and especially during the last three, has itself made the people what they are. It is the Gospel that has wrought itself into the national temper, and has moulded us so much to its own fashion. It is the Gospel which has planted in our hearts that sense of individuality, that seriousness of conviction, which despotism dreads, and which it can never crush. It is this deep belief, and this sense of the authority of truth, which has come to be a national characteristic, and which is the guarantee of our liberties, religious and political. It is this Gospel that has given us our higher tone of domestic virtue, our relish for home, our home-bred feelings, and our true idea of personal delicacy, and our sense of individual importance, consistently with individual modesty. It is thence, and from the vernacular diffusion, and the daily usage and hearing of the Scriptures, that we have drawn the power and point, the simplicity and the majesty, the tropical richness, the opulence, and the fervour of our conversational style, and of public oratory.

Combine what is proper to each of these aspects of the same facts, and then the result is this—that Christianity, in its migrations through eighteen centuries, has betaken itself to the BRITISH PEOPLE, as if these were *its own*, and that these, under its influence, and at its inspiration, have become such as they are—if not the

most highly educated among the nations, yet the most effective, the most beneficent, the most humane, and the people to whose purposes and labours the world looks for what is good and hopeful.

THE CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT does indeed demand liberty as its indispensable condition; but it is not a vague or unemphatic liberty that will suffice. It is not mere freedom to breathe and to speak, such as you may find anywhere, but it is the earnest-minded liberty, the freedom *positive* which one is conscious of enjoying in the dense centre of a people whose minds are headed up by INSTITUTIONS: it is that liberty which gives a strong pulse to the energies of men, individually and socially: it is the liberty of men who differ from each other resolutely, who oppose each other pertinaciously, and who contend for their opinions, or for their prerogatives, with a vehemence stopping short only at the border beyond which the rights and properties of others would be invaded.

What we need for carrying forward an unexceptionable argument in defence of Christianity is, every man's feeling, not merely that, without rebuke, he may become as wise as he can, and may profess and teach what he thinks to be true and good; but more than this, that he may humour himself among his crochets, and may be as absurd as he pleases; that he may proclaim his whim, whatever it be, and endow it too, and spend upon it his children's inheritance. Within a community which is indeed free, everything may be said, done, and practised, which does not inflict damage upon others: and then, all such things may be assailed with equal freedom.

If indeed we may hope to reach a conclusion which is

not afterwards to be rejected as precipitate, we must not betake ourselves to countries where there is no escape from despotism. Nor will it be enough for us to know that, albeit questions concerning existing institutions are straitly prohibited, the wilds of abstruse speculation are free land—that the back-woods of philosophy have not been parcelled out, and that 'Government' maintains no police in the Sheol of Universal Disbelief.

The English on this side the Atlantic hold an advantage, even in comparison with our brethren of the United States. Grant it that their liberty is much like our own; and they may perhaps think it more entire than ours; yet if it shows a wider surface, it embraces less of deep purpose. No Code-making according to theory will give a people that which our *history* has given ourselves: our social condition is the offspring of the many struggles we have passed through. If the American liberties are also the fruits of events, these have gone into theory: with us they have issued in the creation of those beneficial anomalies which no theory would ever allow; but which, in the working of a constitutional system, are more serviceable to a people than anything which men sit down to contrive for themselves. Antagonisms *come*, they are never called for. Anomalies confront us unbidden; they perplex us; we quarrel with them: but against our consent, they secure to us the very highest advantages. So is it especially in whatever touches the ecclesiastical framework under which we live and act.

One of these benefits, and the one we have just now to make proof of, is this—that the Christianity of the

British people stands exempt from all suspicion of combination among its adherents: so planted are we in companies on the flanks of Ebal and Gerizim, that a damage to the one cause which sincerely we all wish to uphold, arising from our dissensions, is an event far more probable than the bringing in of any advantage, from our concert, and collusion.

How far the moral or political condition of any of the Continental states would show a change, it is not easy to conjecture, supposing a silent dying out of religious belief to occur, that is—Christian belief—from the mind of the people, and from the lip of the state. But there can be no such room for doubt as to ourselves. What those various consequences might be, resulting from a national abandonment of our present faith in the Divine origin of the Bible, this is not the place to inquire; yet there is reason to think that such an apostasy would mean—national annihilation.

Whether it might be so or not, it is certain that Christianity has always shown itself to be MIGRATORY: it abides with a people for a century, or for a thousand years; but it does not chain itself to a soil, as with bands of brass.

Hitherto no combination of adverse forces—neither persecutions from without, nor perversions from within —nor deluges of barbarism, have availed to dislodge Christianity from the world. Yet unobtrusive causes have often driven it from countries. Fixing the eye upon any one spot, thence to watch the waxing and waning of the light of the Gospel, one might think it a terrestrial phosphorescence, rather than a luminary of

heaven. It shines upon a land to-day; to-morrow these beams may have drawn themselves up to their source!

This readiness to depart—this word always upon its lip, *μεταβαίνωμεν ἐντεῦθεν*, which seems to be its law, as to cities and countries—does it not repeat itself in individual instances every day? The religious history (for example) of the once Christian cities of the East, is a narrative, at large, of what is written—small, in the personal history of many around us—perhaps in our own. In the fresh season of life Christianity had lodged itself firmly in a man's affections, and in his reason too, so far as the reason was then developed. Within the chamber of conscience the ethics of the Scriptures was always listened to as the ultimate authority: never did it seem doubtful that this rule of virtue, if indeed obeyed, would lead in the path of rectitude and of purity, and would issue in the highest good. But the conflicts of mature life, and its seductions, came upon this neophyte: they came with their moral ambiguities, with their overwrought requirements, with their blandishments. A hubbub of contending impulses came to fill the chamber wherein, formerly, Conscience and Christianity used to confer in so consentient a tone that the two voices fell upon the ear as one sweet sound.

Thenceforward Christianity betook itself to a lodgement remote from this place of noise—the mature man's brain. When so lodged at a distance, it came to be regarded as a Personage whose merits might be weighed, whose claims were open to inquiry, and who might be brought to terms along with other rival authorities: perhaps its demands were scouted as excessive and im-

practicable. Every day the aerial perspective intervening between this departing Power and the busy man, gave him more and more advantage over it, as an Authority.

Then came on the detractors of Christianity—a motley crew: these detractors were sinister in look, and they were intent upon rending and tearing and treading in the mire whatever might be abandoned to their will: this was their hour; and there came up with them one in the garb of a sage, who, in an attempered tone, and as if he held back a secret purpose, whispered such things to the prejudice of the Religion of the man's youth as could not but be listened to: he said, 'It is due to myself, it is due even to Christianity, if I am again to admit it to my confidence, to give these reasonable allegations a patient hearing: I will do so when leisure permits.' Leisure did not come to this man at his call; but it came in its own way; and during its stay the question of Christianity was considered anew, and it did obtain a hearing; and in the full exercise of mature reason, aided by the experience of years, it *did* make good its hitherto unexamined claims. It re-entered the chamber of conscience; it rekindled the extinct affections; it became the spring of energies, and the fountain of hope.

Such, in this instance, was the actual issue: but how easily might it have been otherwise! A train of events, seemingly casual, taking their course in another direction, and then this man would have gone on to the end, as his companions in active life have gone. In their company, whatever was not palpable, was as a

dream, to the bodings of which it would be inane to pay regard. In the hurry of many interests Christianity —and with it every definite forethought of a future life, may pass out of sight and be lost for ever; just as a man may quit his hold of the arm of a friend in a crowded street, and see him thenceforward no more.

What may happen to the individual man, and which does happen to thousands, may happen to communities—if not with so little observation, or within the brief term of two decades, yet within the limits of the years that measure out a generation. Regular habits, a discreet silence, and churchgoing, will carry the individual man ostensibly well through a period of religious syncope; and thus in like manner its ancient INSTITUTIONS, and its usages, and its conventional proprieties, may avail to bear a people onward some way beyond the point at which their religious professions have ceased to be genuine, and are formal only. Yet such a hollowness as this can but have a limited time allowed it. What a people has indeed become, will declare itself at some moment when an unlooked-for turn in its affairs gives involuntary utterance to its inner thoughts.

Immeasurably far from any such hollow condition as this, is the English Christianity of this present time. If certain classes are less loyal in their religious attachments than lately they were, other classes have become much more so. A genuine religious feeling is deepening on the one hand, if it be fading away on the other. Yet is it certain that, during the last few years, a progress towards Disbelief has become a marked feature in literature and society. If the Press did not make this cer-

tain, every one who listens to the accidental utterances of men's feelings, must know it to be the fact. Such a tendency is a gravitation, the property of which is to accelerate itself at a rapid rate. The English people are not disbelievers; but they may become such soon, unless a better direction be given at once to the mind of the educated classes.

No one whose habit of mind it is to pay regard to that which affects the community, can refrain from thus considering the Christian question in its bearing upon our national welfare. So it must be, if one cares for England, and thinks of the position which it occupies among the nations, as the only free and religious country of the Old World;—the only country in which a renewed profession of adherence to Christianity could be thought to have much argumentative value.

And yet although I advert to facts of this general sort—half political as they are, it is not as related to national interests, nor as a secular question, that we are now to enter upon a subject so deep, and which touches the peace and the hopes of each one of us. But do not be alarmed at the hearing of these customary phrases. I am not intending to preach, as if to frighten you into Belief. Several reasons would forbid my attempting so to do; but this especially—that I have to ask you to hold, at my command, your REASON. To make you a CHRISTIAN, in the *deep* sense of the term, is not my work; but I hope to show you that you ought to be such; and with this end in view, I shall use no means of suasion against which you can rightfully except.

Besides, I shall call upon you to judge between me and

those overweening writers of the present time, who allow themselves great licence in speaking of Christians—I mean, of men equal to themselves every way—as besotted, blinded by childish prejudices, wanting in honesty; or if not so, in understanding; and who deal always in 'miserable shifts,' 'paltry evasions,' and 'unworthy subterfuges.' I think I see at the impulse of what motives these unseemly imputations have been so plentifully strewed over the pages of some recent books. We Christians *must* be fools or knaves, for the ease and comfort of those who reject Christianity. Be it so.

Yet I will say this to yourself. When you find me faulty in any such manner, when you see that I am inwardly trembling in the consciousness of difficulties I dare not name, and cannot dispose of, when you find that I have recourse to any of these alleged 'shifts,' 'evasions,' 'subterfuges,' when I cease to satisfy you as thoroughly ingenuous, straightforward, and upright in argument, then lay these pages aside.

RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF THE ROMAN WORLD IN THE TIME OF ALEXANDER SEVERUS.

THE thirteen years during which ALEXANDER SEVERUS held the empire of the world, from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, and from the sands of the African desert to the Baltic, afford a good resting-place whereupon we may establish ourselves at ease, and thence look around us. On this platform we may both of us dismiss all alarms—you as a philosopher, and I as a Christian; for the young man in whose hand is our civil existence is mild in temper; and though firm, yet is he just and reasonable. He is such, on the whole, as one should wish the Master of mankind to be. As to philosophers, he cares little for them; he is not jealous of you, like a Domitian: he is a man of affairs, although also a man of mind; and he knows that, think what you may, you have not courage either to act or to suffer so as to give him any trouble. Toward me indeed he has some uneasy thoughts; nevertheless he will not be induced, even by reasonable apprehensions of danger to the Roman State, to do violence to the spirit of Roman law, although its letter might well warrant his taking that course: he will not hurt—much less attempt to exterminate, good citizens whose only fault is a strange pertinacity in the matter of their

superstition. ALEXANDER SEVERUS was not a mindless despot; therefore the philosopher is safe while he lives; and as he was not a MARCUS AURELIUS, the Christian also may freely breathe. Besides, this Emperor—no softling himself—is not ashamed to take counsel of his mother; and she, although indiscreetly frugal, is a wise woman, who, having trained her son for empire, took care to screen him from the vices of the times, and to hold off not merely the corruption that would have enfeebled his youth, but the fanaticism that might have inflamed his ripening manhood. It is even suspected that Mammæa, either in Syria or at Rome, had come to know so much of the now-spreading religion, as to forbid that it should be cruelly trampled on. If so, then she is not the first imperial lady who has gleaned in the fields of the Church, to its advantage and her own.

We take our stand then at this resting-place, as a point of observation, whence the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them are visible, and where they may with advantage be contemplated. Hence we may look up the stream of time, through the hundred years that were occupied by COMMODUS, M. AURELIUS, ANTONINUS PIUS, HADRIAN, and TRAJAN.

As related to the purpose which I have now in view, this position has a definite advantage, which we must not lose sight of. Outspread before us is a wide field—it is the world in fact, so far as history knows much of those times; and as to the evidence thereto relating, it is very voluminous. The folios and the quartos of that period, and those which serve to attest its principal facts, much more than cover a library table. It cannot

therefore be pretended that I am leading the way into a dim region—the land (in a literary sense) of the shadow of death—scarcely shone upon by here and there a glimmering lamp.

In the mass of materials under our hand, some things are worthless—much is not available for any argumentative purpose; some portions are of doubtful authority; and some things are undoubtedly spurious. Yet all these deductions—or if they were more than they are—fall very far short of amounting to what might touch any conclusion I am intending to draw from my evidence. I am not driven to the necessity to fight a hard battle for a single treatise or book, like Boyle against Bentley; nor to number and weigh ancient manuscripts in support of a doubtful reading. The materials on my table are, as to any use I am intending to make of them, safe from all reasonable objection.

And besides the copiousness of these materials, there is this peculiar circumstance attaching to them, taken just at the moment at which I have chosen to make a stand: it is this, that the mass combines the two, as yet unamalgamated and adverse elements—on the one side, the polytheistic and philosophic; on the other side the Christian. The literature of the gods, and of the philosophers who threw the handful of incense upon the altars in contempt, had not yet died away; nor had this philosophy been infringed upon, or curtailed, or put in fear: its own decrepitude was its only disparagement.

Then, on the Christian side, no favour which it had not dearly purchased, or did not well deserve, had as yet been shown to the new religion; it was not yet a *religio*

licita: it drew its breath in suspense from day to day, and it hung upon the personal dispositions of proconsuls, or the temper and politics of the Cæsar for the time. The Christian literature of the era before us alternately fires up with the courage of conscious truth; or it flickers as in the gust of adversity.

But now what was this Roman world, in the fore-front of which I am intending to bring in, artist-like, and with every possible advantage, the CHRISTIANITY I am pleading for?

It is natural that you should imagine me setting to work with an ample canvas before me, and mixing the colours that are most proper for my background, with forethought of the effect that is to be produced by the picture. Shall I not have in readiness the lurid reds, the cloudy purples, with store of the deepest blacks? shall I not spread a Rembrandt palette for the depths of that canvas, the centre of which is destined for saints, for confessors, and for a choir of cherubs?

I am going to work in no such manner. It is not merely for the sake of having at my command abundance of evidence that I take my position at the point of time I have named; but it is because I wish to have to do with nothing that is not unquestionably real. On my own side I expect to find none but real men; many of them, good and true, whose motives and principles of conduct I can understand, whose failings need not be cloaked, whose errors give me no alarm; whose follies, if any, do not put my argument in peril; and whose wisdom and virtue I shall know how to interpret, and assign to its source. I am not in quest either of super-

human men, or of angels, walking the earth. I know I shall find a superhuman religion—and I know that I shall come upon the footsteps of God.

On the other side, there is no motive inclining me to blacken heathenism for the sake of a contrast. On the contrary, I had much rather show Christianity, shining bright upon a moderately illumined surface, than made to appear artificially resplendent by setting it upon a ground of the deepest shades.

We are sometimes told—'If you would know what heathenism is, and would understand what it was which the Gospel had to contend with, and which it vanquished, go to India, and there look about you;—heathenism is the Devil's religion, and therefore it is always the same, though it may show a different face in different countries.' No, I think not. Whatever polytheism may be, as to its inner nature, and as the Devil's religion—and such I think it is—yet among some nations it may coexist with influences—alien to itself, which may attemper and amend and correct it, so as to forbid its worst enormities, and that, when compared with its unmixed condition, as developed among other families, the resemblance of the two is partial only; and we shall find ourselves perplexed if we rush into argument, assuming that the gods are the gods, meet them where we may.

At the time when Christianity was yet in its purity, it made inroads upon the grounds of Buddhism and of Brahminism; but it failed to overturn either; it did not even extensively colonize India; it did but breathe there. Those forms of polytheism presented no attem-

pered elements, whence its assault upon human nature might draw an initial advantage.

And should we not as Christians be glad to find it a fact, that whereas the Gospel sickened and died upon the pestilential swamps of India—those plains sodden with human blood, and abominable even still more for the practices of the living, it lived and spread on the soil which Greek poetry had planted out as a garden, upon which Plato had built his palaces of thought, and where Aristotle had reared his logical fortresses? The Polytheism, which the Gospel *did* supplant, was that religion, under the shade of which Epictetus had fashioned his scheme of virtue; it was the religion under which Plutarch and Seneca had digested so well the wisdom of the past, and had mused of better things to come; it was the religion in conforming to which Roman emperors—unresisted despots as they were, had ruled the world with justice, mercy, and truth, and had learned to govern—more than the Imperium Romanum—their own passions. Nevertheless for *this* elaborate paganism Christianity proved itself an overmatch.

From the platform whereon we now stand one might be tempted to look around upon the gorgeous spectacle that presents itself on every side. We are used to think of the times of Hadrian and of Alexander Severus, as degenerate; we do so because they stand, toward us of modern times, in optical conjunction with the Augustine age: and then again we see them as if they were laden with the ruin and disaster—the decay and the barbarism, of an after time, the blame of which we are apt to throw upon the men of this middle period.

Putting away these mere illusions of position—these errors in perspective—the prospect before us is such as at no other point of time, either much earlier, or much later, this earth of ours has presented. The Roman landscape—contemplated at any moment during the reigns of the benignant emperors, beginning with Trajan, has not had its parallel—if the WEST and the EAST are thought of *together*—in any other period. Certainly the same area of three thousand miles by two thousand, *now* shows a falling off in almost every item of estimation, namely—population, material wealth, breadth of cultivated surface, the number and splendour of cities, and the magnitude and utility of those public works which at once were the praise of the central government, and the means of sustaining its power.

The EAST, and the WEST, and AFRICA, taken into the reckoning *together*, the world that now is—the great field over which our summer tourists are wandering, does not seem to have gained much upon the world, such as it was in the age of the Antonines. What is certain is this—That, in relation to the mighty revolution which in that age was advancing towards its crisis, the human family (so far as it is authentically reported of it by continuous and intelligible history) had never before, and has never since, so presented itself to a plastic hand to be moulded anew, as then it did. That was the epoch which might most fairly have been fixed upon, as proper for making a new experiment upon humanity, which should be decisive in its issue.

The fully-developed and educated MIND of the human

family was then to be found clustering, at bright centres, and thence diffused over surfaces, everywhere between and within the boundaries of the Roman empire. Among the cultured nations of this area, THOUGHT took its wayward flight; and on no side did it come up to adamantine barriers; its own power of wing being its only limit. Into all regions of speculation a way had been freely opened. The Roman roads, centring at Rome, and running out, as if contemptuous of the rugged surface, right away into, and through, the gloom of primeval forests, did but symbolize those beaten ways which Philosophy had opened for herself and for her sons, outward, from the home amenities of Poetry and Rhetoric, toward the dark unknown of abstruse speculation.

It is true that the human mind in that age had ceased to be creative: the men of earlier times had wrought up the material of the fine arts and of poetry, and had occupied the ground on every side. The nations, using the languages of Greece and Rome, were living deliciously upon the intellectual products of an age of more life and energy. The human mind did not any longer seem luminous, as if from within; but yet its lamp was fed from a store of oil which apparently was inexhaustible.

At no one time in the world's history has erudite intelligence been spread over so large a surface, geographically, or had it come, as *one body* of philosophy and literature, into the keeping of so large a number of persons, as at the time whereat now we have made a pause. If we take an earlier age, then the WEST was

redeemed from barbarism only at points; or if we take a much later time, then the clouds of a sky, overcast for a thousand years, were gathering over both the WEST and the EAST: or, if we come down to more modern times, the vast regions of the East, with Africa and Egypt, are a howling wilderness, and the habitation of dragons.

Whence then shall we furnish ourselves with the dark colours, by aid of which we are to recommend the brightness of the Gospel, which was then making its way toward supremacy?

This darkness, which is to give us our intended contrast, does not spring from barbarism, or from ignorance, or from intellectual slumber, but from UNIVERSAL INCERTITUDE, which was the characteristic of the times; it is the gloom of that moral dismay which comes upon cultured minds, when they abandon in despair the long-cherished hope of seizing upon truth and certainty—of *knowing* something beside the theorems of Euclid—of grasping in the hand a stay immovable. The soul reels and sickens when it turns hither and thither, vainly endeavouring to learn out of what chaos man had sprung, and into what abyss his destinies would plunge him.

To disguise this despair, or to divert it, the levities of literature and the endless inanities of criticism had been resorted to. For choking it, Stoicism was the means employed. Yet, and notwithstanding the efforts of elaborate frivolity on the one part, and of a death-like doctrine on the other, the comfortless dismay of the human mind—hopeless of Truth, uttered itself in a moan—a low wailing, of which we may catch the

echoes at whatever point we listen to the voice of that age.

Let any one whose course has not been altogether sensual, or merely busy, but who has known what are called 'exercises of mind,' go back to those moments of his life when convictions, beliefs, persuasions of every kind, were passing away from his view, and when nothing remained to him but a dread uncertainty, and the feeling as if never again he should grasp a truth. In the recollection of such a season one would think it appropriately called—the night-time of the soul; and not less so, although all the splendours of literature and science were then glittering around him. It must be so: for the first necessity of man's higher nature is TRUTH, and the despair of finding it is indeed—a darkness that may be felt.

It was in this sense of the word, that a thick darkness rested upon the cultured members of the human family (of the Roman empire) at the time which we have chosen for our survey. From the time when the *genius* of the Greek and Roman literature had departed, that darkness had sensibly gathered blackness; for in fact, as it is the very property of Genius, and its first characteristic, to speak and behave itself as in the conscious possession of whatever it touches, and as it is its prerogative to impart to illusions the aspect of reality, therefore, so long as this spontaneous power lives among a people, they may believe that truth is still extant, somewhere, because its tones are still heard.

In this definitely explained sense of the term, then, I am warranted in affirming that—thinking of the poly-

theistic and philosophic majority of the people, throughout the circuit of the Roman civilization, a deep gloom at this time covered the nations, and that the people sat as 'in the shadow of death.' It would be easy to make good other allegations, tending to show that this gloom was darkened by the ever-growing corruption of morals—by the decay of public spirit, by the dissoluteness which despotism encourages, and by that depravation of the humane emotions which came from the frequency and the sanguinary atrocity of the exhibitions of the amphitheatre. But from all this we may abstain, for it does not materially affect the argument.

Grant this, that, as to the Life of the Soul—as to that brightness of assured belief toward which human nature tends with so strong an instinct and so earnest a craving, it was a season of dimness, and of more than dimness; it was the most gloomy season in the history of mankind; for all shadows were then lengthening and spreading; and a chill was in the atmosphere, foreboding a wintry night at hand.

Throughout the countries whereupon the once festive polytheism of Greece had built its altars, mockery had supplanted religious awe; a factitious fanaticism had come in the place, both of gay observances and of serious feeling. Philosophy had uttered her last promises, and had broken them. On no side did light break forth.

From a worldly point of view we have thus looked abroad upon the kingdoms of the Roman earth, and have imagined their glory. But now, shutting out that mundane glare, what we see is a thick cloud, over-

shadowing the prospect, even from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.

Yet all is not dark. If we pass down the Mediterranean, from the Pillars of Hercules, and look to the right hand and to the left, and carry the eye inland too, as far as to the furthest barriers of the Empire, the whole of the coast-line on both sides throughout this voyage, and every headland, and every mountain range, more remote, and every temple-crowned acropolis, and every lofty front, glows as if the sun were rising. A Light has already arisen upon the nations; a promise of Truth, and an assurance as to the destiny of man, has brightened the gloom.

Everywhere—the exceptions are few—throughout the regions which the Mediterranean divides, in cities and in fields, we meet companies of men, even multitudes, who have quite thrown off the listlessness of scepticism—men from whose countenances the sullenness of atheism has been dispelled, and who speak to us in the decisive tones that spring from an accepted and undoubted BELIEF. These men show, in their animated looks, and by the determination of their behaviour, that there is in them the vitality of a Religious persuasion which they do not distrust.

How cordially to be welcomed is such a visitation, as of the morning—if indeed it be the morning! How good a promise was it for mankind of an escape from the gulph toward which the human family was slowly yet surely drifting away! A sure holding has at length been found. Some—nay thousands of the people, declare that their feet do touch firm ground in the waters of religious

opinion, and that they stand where good standing is. Instead of those inarticulate babblings, as from the frivolous million, and instead of those doleful murmurs of the desponding, the ear now catches the intelligible utterances of men who say they have come into the possession of CERTAINTY, and of hope.

Whether the grounds of this confident assurance were of that kind which we in this age should think solid and sufficient, does not yet appear. It is probable that many, or even a large proportion of those in *that* age who made this profession, could have given no such reason for 'the hope that was in them;' as would have compelled the assent of the men of these times, or such as could have endured a ten minutes' cross-examination in the modern forensic style.

This does not at all concern us now to inquire. The FACT is all we have to do with, which fact, briefly stated, is this—That at the time now in prospect, multitudes of men, of all the races that were then subject to the Roman sway (and of some other races probably) had passed from a condition of frivolous indifference, or of sensual obtuseness, or of sullen hopelessness, and had come—rightfully or not, into the possession of a bright and well-defined religious belief.

If we were to set forth this belief in the most concise terms possible, it would stand in the form of an affirmative reply to three questions, which questions are as old as the world, and to which men, from the very beginning, have been seeking, but not finding, an answer.

'Is there a Supreme Being who cares for man, and in whose wisdom and goodness man may confide?'

'Is there an after life, and a retribution?'

'Is there forgiveness of sins with God?'

It is not that no solutions—more or less intelligible, had been attempted, and had been obtained, of these vital problems; for the moral instincts of men had, in some way, solved them. Every form of worship had assumed a reply to them in the affirmative; and philosophical meditation had done its part—ambiguously enough—to answer them. Yet, all this while the reply—let it come whence it might, carried no peremptory conviction into the hearts of those who heard it. It came with no weight of authority; it came as a balanced probability—it professed no attestation. But now at length it *has* so come. —The reply—the 'yea' which Christianity has uttered, takes a thorough hold of men's inmost souls, as well as of their reason. Whether or not this confidence of theirs was strictly warrantable, according to our notions of the laws of evidence, the FACT that they did so believe is beyond all question; and of the strength of this their persuasion proofs were given, than which any more conclusive cannot be imagined.

This then is the point we have reached—That, in the century which is named from Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines, the instructed races bordering upon the Mediterranean were in a transition state, and were passing from darkness to light; that is—the Light of a confidently held religious Belief—whether true or false.

THE CHRISTIAN BELIEF HAD PERVADED THE ROMAN CIVILIZATION IN THE THIRD CENTURY.

In what follows, I shall imagine that all we can know about Christianity, as to its origin and its earlier period, must be gathered from the literary remains of the age which we have now before us. Every thing, every book, treatise, memoir, fragment, that might have come down to us from a date anterior to the accession of Trajan, I will suppose has perished. And even as to the books that are extant, I draw my pen through all citations of the Christian writers of a preceding age that appear in them.

Besides doing this, I dismiss from my recollection whatever I may have come to know of the after history of Christianity, or of the literature of times subsequent. What we have to do with at present, is all found between two chronological termini—the accession of TRAJAN, and the death of ALEXANDER SEVERUS.

Then, as to the materials belonging to this bounded period, various as they are, I handle them with entire freedom. As I have already said, I have no anxiety about disputed passages, interpolations, or books of doubtful authorship. This only should be said, that, as I undertake to do nothing for those who may be pre-

resolved to believe nothing, and are determined to stick to every imaginable paradox that may help them to effect their escape from Christianity, I am supposing so much acquiescence as to the reality of the materials before us, as well informed men, warped by no prejudice, will always be ready to grant.

The countries, provinces, and cities of the Roman empire, within which Christianity had openly established itself about the middle period of the second century, are easily named, and they may be certainly known. But to what extent, as to the population in each province or city, conversion from heathenism had taken place, this must be matter of surmise; or at best of probable inference. We should incline to hold back from the highest estimate of this proportion; and therefore must listen with caution to the assertions of those Christian apologists in following whom we might be led to believe that, if times of severe suffering are allowed for, a *majority* of the people in all the principal cities of the empire had become Christians, and that the country folk were forsaking their paganism in large numbers. Pliny's report, made to his master at the commencement of our period, does indeed appear to carry the same meaning, and we might perhaps infer as much from other testimonies. But the statistics of this subject does not touch any point of our argument.

Gibbon supposes that, at the most, not more than a twentieth part of the entire population of the empire had become professedly Christian at the moment preceding the edict of Milan. This population—taken midway in the second century, he estimates at one hundred and twenty

millions. We may believe that, in the interval of a century and a half, the Christian proportion had gone on increasing, so that in the time of ANTONINUS PIUS we should not be warranted in computing them at more than a thirtieth or perhaps a fortieth part of the whole; that is to say, if we accept Gibbon's rule.

Yet it is not easy to reconcile so low an estimate as this with the averments of Tertullian, which were loudly uttered, and addressed to the hostile Roman authorities—able as they were, and willing enough, to give them a flat contradiction, if they had been glaringly false.—'We are but of yesterday,' he says, 'and we have filled everything that is yours;' cities, islands, castles, free towns, council halls, the very camps, all classes of men, the palace, the senate, the forum. We have left you nothing but your temples. We can number (out-number) your armies: there are more Christians in a single province (than in your legions)!' At the time now spoken of, it is probable that the Roman world included from three to five millions of Christian people.

These converts, as I have said, were spread over an area three thousand miles in length, from east to west, and two thousand in breadth, from north to south. I take no account here of ultra-Euphratean Christianity, which however had branched off on the right hand into southern India, and on the left into Parthia, and it went even as far as China. Media, Persia, Bactria, Arabia, had also listened to the Gospel.

The machinery of a government so complete and efficient as was that of the Roman empire, and the universality of two languages;—especially the wide

diffusion of the better of the two, and the energies of commercial enterprise, and the purer commerce of mind —the interchange of philosophy, literature, and art—all these influences combined, had brought the nations then subject to Rome into a condition of relationship and communion, which, perhaps, even the boasted facilities of modern times do not much—if at all surpass. As to the actual velocity of travel, it is true that days now stand for the weeks of an ancient voyage or journey; or even for months; but as to the actual intercommunion of nations—the East and the West, and Africa, it may be questioned whether it be at all greater now than it was in the age of Hadrian.

The spread of the Gospel had been favoured from the first by all these means of intercourse; and it took to itself the wings of every energy which then carried men to and fro between the three continents. It used the roads and the ships of the empire; it went in the track of caravans. It flowed, as one might say, through the arteries of the Greek language, philosophy, and literature; it went wherever books had gone before it: culture was a preparation of the soil for its reception. Forests and wilds it *did* penetrate by adventurous and precarious missions; but, alongside of the refinements of a high civilization, it dwelt as its fittest home.

In each of the great cities of the empire—Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and in every second, third, and fourth-rate city, Christianity claimed an appreciable proportion of the citizens as its own; in some cities it had a large majority. From each of these centres it spread itself over the rural surface; at some points

imperfectly colonizing only, in other directions suffusing itself without limit. Thus did it lodge, or thus did it dwell, in Spain and Gaul, even as far as to the shores of the Northern Ocean. Britain, a favoured asylum of Roman leisure and refined rural enjoyment, had welcomed the Gospel from the first. Italy, Illyricum, Macedonia, Thrace, and Greece, it had pervaded; and the provinces of Asia Minor still more fully; and in some of its provinces and cities the entire mass of the people were professedly Christian. Throughout Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Syria, churches, well organized, had meted out the geographical surface, more or less completely.

In turning the face again westward, the same divided state of the population meets us; at some points the Christian and the Polytheistic elements were nearly balanced. Egypt, Lower and Upper, was to a great extent Christian. Cyrene, Carthage, the whole of Proconsular Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania, had also thus become obnoxious to the Roman state: for as to these regions, it was asserted that the new religion was rapidly spreading in town and country, among all ranks, not even excepting the highest.

Geographically, or as to square miles, numbered on the surface of the globe, the religion of Christ had spread itself over the entire area which is distinctly known to history at the time now before us. Statistically it was fast tending toward such a proportion as to render its further increase a subject of well-founded disquietude to the government. As to classes, it had emerged from the servile class; and it had spread largely among the

free and the privileged; it had taken its position in the legions, and had seated itself in places of honour and profit. As to mind and learning, it had engaged the zealous aid of the best instructed and the most eloquent men of the times. The heathen writers—their contemporaries, can claim no sort of superiority over them.

The facts thus briefly alluded to may, as every one knows, be easily substantiated by citations, Greek and Latin, that would fill many pages.

But for what purpose do I now, in this cursory manner, bring forward what is so well known? Not to repeat, for the hundredth time, what has been affirmed, warrantably, and pointedly, often already: That the spread of Christianity—all the conditions attending it considered—the place, and the feebleness of its origin, the severity of its moral code, its unbendingness, and the furious hostility it encountered;—this spread, thus early, is proof of its reality—of its truth. So it is: but I have now a more specific purpose in view.

CHRISTIANITY—AN INSOLUBLE PROBLEM TO THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT.

VERY often of late we have been told, that the human mind has at length reached a mature condition such as fits it for the task of working out for itself the elements of morality, and the principles of Religion too—so far as any Religion may still seem to be serviceable or necessary. This, it is said, we may all do for ourselves, each for himself, without the aid of a BOOK. What need can there be *now* for sending us to gather lessons from a BOOK, all which lessons we may find written in our hearts, more legibly, and with fewer admixtures of what is obsolete, mystical, or fabulous?

By those who thus speak it is granted that Christianity, in its day, *did* effect a good service for the nations of the West, in ridding them of the old polytheism, and in giving forth a simpler expression of the truths on which Religion and Worship should rest. But having long ago performed this service, we need its aid no more;—it can have nothing further to teach us.

Without pushing the inquiry, how far these spontaneous elements of morality have, in fact, been borrowed from the BOOK itself, or how far the hold they have of us, as an *authority*, is derived from a vague

unacknowledged reference to the SANCTIONS upon which that Book insists, I am willing to accept this home-grown morality, with all the sentiments it recognises—come whence it may, and shall make an appeal to it, and to those sentiments, in a confident manner. Do not draw back from this appeal; then you are mine—you yield yourself to Christianity!

No forward movement among civilized communities has ever come on insensibly; or as if it merely grew out of abstract principles. In each instance it has been the consequence of a visible course of events; it has been the result of a CRISIS, brought on by some shifting of the social forces; and it has gone forward through seasons of suffering, and by means of struggles, and at the cost of life.

When such a crisis has been passed, it will not suffice to sum up the result in a rounded paragraph of generalities, and thus to run off with the benefit, forgetful of the conditions under which it has been obtained for us. Nor will it be enough, merely to assign the praise which may be due to those by whose labours and sufferings a great achievement has been brought to its issue.

Take the case before us, to which I am about to invite your exact attention. It is granted that Christianity did a service to mankind, in its time, by overthrowing the frivolous and absurd mythology and worship which the Roman world upheld, and to which it so resolutely clung. Through centuries longer these fables and superstitions might have retained their place. But, thanks to the Martyrs, the whole congeries of fables was

swept away; a great clearance of the ground was made, and whatever may have been the supervening errors, that ground has been held open for all those advancements which we rejoice in, as indications of even better things to come.

You allow that Christianity did carry the nations through the crisis, and did effect a change which was indispensable to the advancement of mankind; but you affirm that its function has long ago determined with the occasion. You may so think while you keep the facts at a distance, and refuse to descend from generalities. But when these facts come to be strictly regarded, as they should, then it will be seen that some conditions of a very peculiar kind were attached to that suffering-testimony, and to that resistance, by means of which the Christian body, throughout the Roman world, effected what it did effect, in the course of two hundred years. These conditions imply nothing less than the reality of the Christian system, and its consequent perpetuity.

What is affirmed is this, that a revolution affecting in the deepest sense the well-being of the human family, and indispensable to its progress, drew on to a crisis, and passed its crisis in the period intervening between the accession of Trajan and the death of Alexander Severus. I then affirm that this revolution implies the reality of what had brought it on, and therefore involves a belief which touches ourselves, and the remotest future.

The visible circumstances which attended this revolution were such as to consist well with our supposition

of its magnitude, and of the importance of its consequences.

The nations of the three Continents had at that time been drawn together to take their places upon one platform of secular administration: one system of government, ruled by the same political maxims, prevailed over the whole of this diversified surface. All men looked up to one will as the sovereign source of good or ill. All felt their relationship of dependence every moment upon the common centre; and nations the most remote from each other were continually made conscious of a relationship of welfare among themselves. The living organic structure was conscious of its *structure* —as one body.

The period of this structural UNITY was coincident with the period occupied by that conflict with which we are now concerned. The beginning and the end of the Christian crisis, or the time during which the Church, as a body, resisted the strenuous endeavours of the State to maintain and enforce its own maxims of government—this period was synchronous with the structural unity of the Empire. When the conflict had reached, and had passed its term, which was when the State yielded the main point in dispute, and recognised Christianity as one among the *religiones licitæ*, then the Empire split, never again to be one in the same sense. During a sixty years after this crisis had been passed through, the conflict between the two parties continued to be carried on at intervals; but the grounds of it were not the same: when not attributable to the wanton ferocity of the individual emperor, or to his fanaticism,

it had a political, more than a religious meaning, and it expressed the fears of a party which felt itself to be losing ground daily.

The fact, which has often been adverted to, demands attention, that, at those moments in the course of the struggle between the Church and the Empire which have the most *meaning* as related to the point in dispute, the Roman world was ruled by princes who have ever since occupied pedestals, as models of sovereign benignity, of political wisdom, and of personal virtue. Whatever the Christian people, in some provinces, might sometimes suffer at the hands of ferocious magistrates or emperors, or from the rabble, yet when the Church suffered *in its proper character*, as the witness against the polytheism of the State, its *enemy* was always one of these pattern philosophic princes.

This was no accident; for it sprung from the proper conditions of the contest. Whenever—passion and fanaticism apart, the Roman authorities gave their attention to the perplexing problem which Christianity had brought before them, and when they endeavoured to apply to it the only general principles of which they were cognizant, and to give effect to the undoubted rules of Roman policy toward the subjugated nations, then it was that they issued edicts, which—cruel and fatal as might be the consequences thence resulting, did truly embody the unchangeable maxims of the government they administered.

These endeavours—violent in act, temperate in intention—to break through the perplexity which could not be theoretically removed—were of course renewed

from time to time. The Master of the World—indulgent as he would be toward the rites of the vanquished gods, could not allow the *Cæremoniæ Romanæ* to be set at nought, nor permit the religion of the Empire and of all nations to be denounced as nugatory and vicious.

On the part of the Christian body—willing as these were to yield obedience to the State, they had no choice left them but to protest and to suffer. Thus was the contest between the duty of the State and the conscience of the remonstrants quite hopeless; for the struggle could terminate in no way, but either by the extermination of the new Religion and its adherents, or by the defeat and dishonour of the government.

Whence then came this peremptory necessity, on the side of the Christian body, so to protest, and so to suffer?

The point actually in dispute between themselves and the authorities—namely an external compliance with rites which meant little beyond an homage rendered to the Emperor as patron of all religions, did not touch the main part of the Christian system; it was an incidental consequence only of this system which threw its adherents into collision with the State. To profess and maintain Monotheism was not the peculiarity of Christianity. Sages had professed this same belief, and had openly taught it; and so might these Christians, if they would have been content with the promulgation of an abstract doctrine. If only they had gone about maintaining a pure Theism, and telling the people, in a good-natured manner, that the gods they worshipped

were no gods; on these terms, though they might often have been roughly treated by mobs, yet probably they would have provoked no serious animadversion from the Roman government.

Besides, if an ABSTRACT TRUTH only had been in question, and if no other obligation had pressed itself upon Christians, beyond that of declaring and teaching it when and where they could gain a hearing, evasions might easily have been resorted to by themselves, and apologies would gladly have been accepted at the tribunals—sufficient at least for the immediate purpose of screening themselves from suffering, and of excusing the magistrate from the odious duty of inflicting it.

The stress of that compulsion which carried so many men, women, and youths through the endurance of tortures—even to death, and which brought so many apostates, pallid and trembling, to the tribunals, there to clear themselves, at the cost of their souls, of the fatal suspicion—this compulsion sprang wholly from the perfect conviction they had of the certainty of that BODY OF FACTS which constituted, and in which consisted, their Religious Belief.

The Belief of Facts, not an opinion of the truth of principles, was the impulsive cause of that endurance of suffering which we have to consider.

Now just at this point it has been usual to state the argument in behalf of Christianity thus—The constancy of the Martyrs gave evidence of the sincerity of their faith. This faith of theirs, considering the nearness of the events to which it related, and the opportunities then at hand for sifting the evidence, and for detecting

frauds or illusions, is proof of the historic reality of the system that was so accepted and suffered for. So it may be; but this is not precisely the light in which I am looking at the case before us.

Perhaps the suffering Church had not at any time given its mind with sufficient care and intelligence to the task of sifting that evidence on the ground of which it had accepted the Gospel. Its own Belief was indeed pronounced in the most unfaltering tone; and on the strength of it life was surrendered, and the rack endured; but can I now take this same Belief as my own, on the grounds of that same confidence? This is not absolutely certain.

PERPLEXITIES OF THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT IN DEALING WITH THE NEW RELIGION.

THE witness-bearing of the early Church through seasons of intermittent suffering, and during the hundred and fifty years to which we now confine our attention, is available in argument, either *indefinitely*, or *definitely*. Indefinitely, and yet conclusively, is it available, showing the excellence of the Religion which was so contended for; and its moral power also; and so, by legitimate inference, its truth. No fault should be found with this mode of reasoning; but yet we may have recourse to another. What I here intend will best appear in giving attention to two or three of those remarkable instances of constancy to which the imperial edicts gave occasion.

The first of these instances possesses the peculiar advantage of meeting us in a form that is exempt from any suspicion of having been dressed up or coloured, to serve a purpose. You will at once know that I have in view the 97th Epistle of Pliny Junior, and the imperial reply to it.

In this well-defined instance the perplexity of the Roman magistrate on the one hand, and the necessity he felt himself under to act as he did toward the Dis-

sidents, and then, on their part, the counter-necessity that compelled them to suffer, alike present themselves free from all ambiguity.

The Proprætor found the province to which he had been appointed in a state to which he could not be indifferent. Things as they were, could not be left to take their course. The mass of the people of all classes, so he says—multi enim omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus—or, to put the lowest sense we can upon the language of Pliny, a large proportion of them, had become, not simply indifferent to the Religion of the State, but they were eager to denounce it as false; and they had actually adopted another. The temples were forsaken, the simulacra of the gods and of the emperor were defrauded of the customary homage; and besides, stated assemblages of the people were having place for purposes unknown, and therefore unlawful, and not to be tolerated.

It does not appear through what remissness of the authorities this defection had spread so far. But Pliny—this new representative of the majesty of the Empire, in showing himself awake to his duty, and aware of the impending danger, had, by issuing edicts, by judicial inquests, and by the infliction of capital punishment upon the refractory, made some progress in restoring law, and in recovering, for the *Cærimoniæ Romanæ* the lost ground. This he had done before he had determined to report the facts to his master, or ask instructions. Multitudes of the people had at once renounced their Christianity, and had cleared themselves of all suspicion by compliance with the sacrificial rites,

and by uttering—with the required maledictions, the NAME which had come to designate the new community. For the purpose of effecting these conversions in a legal manner, the Roman magistrate had caused the effigies of the gods and of the emperors to be brought into court.

Can we now fancy that we see these divinities coming forward—dolls; or be they what they might, shouldered by the officers of justice, and bobbing and nodding as they came! In style of art these simulacra are vastly superior to the hideous blocks which now grin in our museums, the representatives of the gods of Owyhee and the Sandwich Islands; and yet, whether they be more or less sightly, these effigies, and the vast system of worship which they symbolized, were indeed *blocks*, standing in the way of that next great forward movement which the human mind was destined to take.

This enlightened Roman gentleman and scholar, well conversant as he was with whatever had been said and taught by the philosophers of Greece or Rome, did not seem to be conscious of any humiliation—he did not blush when these stupid symbols had been poised near him, and he—prompting the form of appellation—præeunte me—pointed to them as fit objects of devout regard! The accused—pale and trembling as they did that which he did not blush to exact, offered the incense and the wine, and departed safe!

If the Roman State—then in so advanced a condition of intellectual refinement, and when it was represented by a philosopher and a man of letters, thus showed that it was not then making, and had not made, any progress

whatever toward a better Theology, can it be thought probable that any such reform would spontaneously come about? Whether or not there might yet be a chance of some spontaneous reform, it is certain that the actual reform which did at length take place—the actual expulsion of the gods, and the riddance then effected for the human mind of this encumbrance—this stop to progress, was otherwise brought about.

How then was it indeed effected? Not by the silent spreading of an opinion—not by the gentle diffusion of a better Theologic IDEA—platonic, or of any other sort; but in this severe manner, namely—That throughout all the provinces of the Roman empire—as in this of Bithynia, a multitude of the people—high and low, had accepted, as certain, a belief concerning a PERSON, which belief did, by an incidental consequence therewith connected, absolutely forbid their compliance with polytheistic rites, and therefore compelled them to suffer.

How many soever—at a time of alarm, might be the faltering and the timid, there were never wanting some of firmer moral structure, who, as Pliny here tells us, 'could by no means be induced either to offer sacrifice to the gods, or to speak injuriously of Christ.' Rather than do this, they endured torments, calmly, and they accepted death joyfully.

This constancy of the early Christians, thus severely tried, might well be admitted as valid proof of the reality of the belief on which it rested, especially connected as it was with a blameless morality. Such an admission will readily be made by every mind that is

fraught with moral sensibility, and which has not been damaged by sophistry. Every natural sympathy carries us along with the sufferers, as we stand in the crowd and witness the grave inflexibility of some, the flushed excitement of others—youths and women, and the tremors and the anguish of many who yet did endure to the end. Thus far—or so far as our truest emotions will carry us—we involuntarily side with the condemned. With them we *think* that 'they be no gods which are graven with art and man's device.' With them we *feel*, when we see them led out to die rather than yield their belief, or be false to it.

But why might not these Christians have excused themselves, and by means of some evasion have stood clear of consequences so frightful? Whether they might have done so or not, it would now be superfluous to inquire. They did not do so; and it was not otherwise than by a century and a half of suffering, on the part of the Church, that the gods were thrown from their pedestals.

This was the *obvious* part of the revolution which was then taking place. But another revolution—not obvious indeed, and yet not less important, and not less indispensable in relation to the progress of the human mind and the development of its higher faculties—was, by the same terrible means, then brought about.

We may just imagine that the philosophic Pliny, if we could have taken him apart in his hours of relaxation, might have been brought on so far as to acknowledge that the men whom he had ordered to execution in the morning, were right on the great principle of Mono-

theism. This abstract doctrine was not new to him, and it had received, as he knew, the adhesion of illustrious sages. There stood, however, in the rear of this purer theology, a principle, then in course of development, which neither Pliny nor any men of his time had thought of, or could have been made to comprehend. Nevertheless it is the axiom on which hinges the immeasurable moral difference between classical antiquity and the modern mind. Even the sufferers in that early contest were not competent to put forward any clear enunciation of the principle which themselves were so painfully bringing to bear upon human affairs.

At present we stand clear of the question as to the truth of the Religion in behalf of which the early Church gave its suffering testimony. We abstain also from what belongs to those moral and spiritual benefits which Christianity brought with it, and we postpone also all inquiry touching its own interior beauty and grandeur. The one purport of these preliminary pages is to put, in a distinct light, what it was which the Church of the early age did for mankind in preparation for a new moral era, and under what conditions this necessary function was discharged.

A final clearance of the gods and goddesses from the field of civilization was to be effected; and this was to be done, not by the gentle means of philosophic suasion, but by bringing thousands of the people, in all provinces of the Roman empire, into a position of unavoidable resistance toward the government, in such a way that neither party should find it possible to retreat from its

ground:—not the government, because the first principles of the empire were impugned by this opposition; —not the Christian people, because it was not a mere opinion that sustained their opposition; but a belief toward a PERSON whose authority they regarded as paramount to every other.

Thus to insist on the one side, and thus to resist on the other side, were evenly-balanced necessities, of which frequent martyrdoms were the inevitable consequence.

But this violent process—in the course of which an issue in favour of the sufferers was continually becoming more certain—gave effect to a principle, never apprehended by antiquity, and which was only in an indistinct manner, and insensibly, recognised on the Christian side; and yet, apart from which there could have been no such development of the human mind in the mass, and no such depth given to the moral faculties individually, as have in fact come to place the modern, immeasurably in advance of the ancient, civilization.

The virtue and duty of truthfulness, as between man and man, had been taught, and well enough understood, among ancient nations, whether more or less advanced in civilization. And so had the religious sanctions of morality. But the one lesson which remained to be brought out, and to be wrought into the hearts of men, was—the RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION OF BELIEF; an obligation, not resting upon communities as a public or social charge, but pending, with the whole of its weight, upon the conscience of the individual man;—an obligation personal, a privilege unalienable, and when duly dis-

charged, a function, giving the individual man a pledge of his immortality.

Until this principle should come to be worked out as an axiom in morals, nothing could be hoped for as to the destinies of the human family. Now that it has been thus worked out, and now that it has been accepted as an axiom, the aspect of human affairs can never be so lowering as that we should despond concerning those destinies. But have we sufficiently regarded the fact, that this great problem was solved for us by the martyr Church during the century and half now in prospect?

The sufferers did not know precisely what they were doing in this behalf; and yet, with an observable uniformity, the professions which they made before tribunals, and on scaffolds, took the true direction as related thereto.

As it had been with Pliny, so was it with L. Statius Quadratus, proconsul of Asia. His personal dispositions were such as would be becoming to a Roman magistrate; he was neither sanguinary nor fanatical; but his position in the province was different. The severities to which Pliny had allowed himself to have recourse had been prompted entirely by his own sense of public duty: otherwise they were uncalled for. But Quadratus found himself pressed upon by the fury and fanaticism of the populace:—the rabble of Smyrna, incited, as it appears, by the Jews, was in movement, and a victim must be thrown out to appease the multitude.

The martyrdom of Polycarp, whatever else it may show or may prove, brings out distinctly those conditions

of the struggle between Christianity and the State, to which I have already adverted. The aged bishop behaved on the occasion so as the rule of Christian constancy required him to behave; nor can there be alleged against him any indication of undue excitement. He had consented to conceal himself from the Proconsul's officers so long as this course might fairly be taken. At length he surrendered himself to them with dignity; and these officers had been enjoined, no doubt, to treat so venerable a man with respect. He was urged to yield so far to the authorities as might enable them to screen him from the popular fury. Why not invoke the Emperor, and offer sacrifice? What harm could there be in uttering the words Κύριε Καίσαρ, and then to sacrifice, and thus to save himself? καὶ θῦσαι καὶ διασώζεσθαι. This advice, kindly intended, was urged importunately. "Never shall I do what you advise." Then if not, the time of forbearance had passed, and the aged man was thrust from the chariot with violence by those who had charge of him.

Yet, notwithstanding the clamour of the mob, when the bishop's name was proclaimed in court, the Proconsul used all persuasions that might shake his constancy; and in so doing he shines by the side of the philosopher, who, while surrounded by a trembling crowd, at once sends whoever would not yield, to capital punishment. "Swear by the genius of Cæsar. Change your purpose—utter the words, 'Away with the Atheists.'"

"Away with the Atheists," he could say in his own sense, and he said it with a groan. "Then swear, and

I will release you: revile Christ!" This might not be. Polycarp had been numbered with the servants of Christ from his infancy;—his martyrdom occurred A. D. 167, or a year later; in his youth, therefore, he was contemporary with the last survivor of the Apostles, and thus the whole of his religious persuasion resolved itself into a personal consciousness of facts. These facts, true or false, or partly true and partly illusory, constituted the ground or ultimate reason of his constancy: how could he blaspheme his 'KING and SAVIOUR?' "I am a Christian," and therefore, while professing the Christian rule to obey magistrates, no way of escape was opened to him, except that of contradicting the consciousness he had of his own history, from his boyhood upwards.

With Polycarp this consciousness was more immediate and more personal than it could be with others, his contemporaries: nevertheless with them, not less than with himself, the ground of that Christian fortitude which, in the end, prevailed over the polytheism of the State, was a BELIEF toward a PERSON; it was not an opinion as to a doctrine: and here we should take care to distinguish between the various motives that might come in to sustain the courage of a martyr in his extremity of suffering, and that ONE GROUND on which his constancy rested. In the instance of the Bishop of Smyrna (as in that of Cyprian, probably) considerations of personal honour, as the venerated Chief of the Christian people around him, may have had an influence. So might the motive to which he himself alludes: "You threaten me with a fire which does its

work in one hour; but you think not of the fire of eternal punishment that awaits the wicked." These, or other motives, would have shown little intrinsic force, if they had rested upon an opinion: their power sprang from their connexion with a definite historic belief.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF CONSCIENCE WERE AT LENGTH RECOGNISED.

It is in the course of things that a Great Principle of conduct should long have been acted upon—perhaps for a century or more—before it comes to be explicitly recognised, or to be formally defined and registered in treatises. So it was in the present instance. The suffering Church had *felt* the sacred obligations of Truth; and Christians, individually, had passed through the fiery trial which these obligations required them to meet—compelled so to do by a tacit recognition of this principle—that he who fears God must not deny his inward Belief, even although the avowal may cost him his life.

The ACTS of the early martyrdoms might be copiously cited in illustration of what is here affirmed. But at length, as was natural, the implicit Principle got utterance for itself, and it did so with more and more distinctness continually; gradually it came to be defined, until that great Law of CONSCIENCE, which places the modern mind so greatly in advance beyond the ancient mind, was allowed to stand in the very forefront of ethical axioms.

I do not know whether this law might not be found

in *nearly* as distinct a form among the earlier Christian writings; but it *is* found, well and finely enunciated in that admirable Tract in which Origen deals so strictly with the consciences of his Christian contemporaries, who were then passing through a season of the most severe suffering. The treatise entitled—'Urging to martyrdom,' is of considerable length. It must here suffice to state the drift of it, so far as it bears upon my present purpose.

The terrors of torture—more than the fear of death (for at that time the infliction of torture, rather than of death, appears to have been the determinate intention of the Roman authorities), had shaken the constancy of many among the Christians; and so it was that pleas and evasions of every kind had been sought for, and had been found, by aid of which the religious obligation attaching to a Christian belief might be made to consist with a retreat from the field of conflict. Origen meets and refutes these evasions—one by one, and in doing so he gives expression to a principle which we all of this age—believers and unbelievers, profess to think sacred, and which we acknowledge as the basis of personal virtue, and in the abandonment of which self-respect is gone.

Well does this confessor labour to animate the courage of his faltering brethren by opening before them the prospects of immortality: but he hastens toward his main purpose, which was to snatch from them those evasive pleas, in search of which too many of them were employing an ill-directed ingenuity. The timid were trying to persuade themselves that a genuine faith,

hidden in the heart, might avail for ensuring their salvation; for 'with the heart man believeth for justification'—nay, he says—but salvation has another condition, which is not by us to be severed from the first, for 'with the mouth confession is made unto salvation;' and there might be room to think that a bold confession of the truth, even if the heart is too little animated by love to God, honours Him more than does a heart which withholds this confession.

Whether we grant this or not, it must be acknowledged that this Father is here laying the foundation-stone of our modern sense of the stern obligation of religious sincerity. Yet the laying this stone, at that time, what courage did it demand! Such courage as he himself displayed in the hour of trial!

The Proconsul, Quadratus, as we have seen, had vehemently urged upon Polycarp the friendly advice, to save himself by uttering five words—Only swear by the genius of Cæsar, and I will let you go.—It means nothing, or very little. It appears that the Christians of a later time had begun to suggest this very evasion, one to another, and that they were endeavouring to get it accredited and accepted as valid. Not so, says Origen: it is a hollow excuse, and will not save you. If it be a transgression to swear by Heaven, by Earth, by Jerusalem, by one's own head, how much greater a sin must it be to swear by the fortunes of another, ὀμνύναι τύχην τινός? Can we dare to whisper a faithless purpose in the presence of Him who declares that he is jealous of His right over us; and to do this moreover at the moment when inquiry is made concerning our faith,

and when torments are in sight? 'Confess me before men,' says Christ, 'and I will confess you: deny me, and I deny you.'

To give no place to the Devil, who is ever suggesting evasions—to allow no thought which tends to a denial of Christ to lodge in our hearts—to put from us the very recollection of those most dear to us, children and wife, or earthly possessions—to do this is to satisfy the requirements of Christ: to do otherwise, or anything less, is to fall short of them, and we must take the consequence.

Let us note the fact that this strenuous mode of dealing with the infirm consciences of his brethren, on the part of Origen, and whence were to result benefits incalculable to mankind, drew the whole of its force from an *historic source*, that is to say, from the authority of CHRIST.

When we entered, says Origen, upon the Christian life, we pledged ourselves to observe its conditions, to take up the cross, and to deny ourselves, even for His sake who shed His precious blood for our redemption.

The common obligations of truthfulness, as between man and man, had long before been well understood; but now this new and higher obligation—binding man, individually, to God as the object of all worship and duty, came on to be enforced, and Origen urges it upon his brethren with reasons which could not be rebutted; moreover he sustains these reasons—not by philosophy (with which however he himself was conversant) but by many pertinent citations of Scripture. To give this higher obligation its utmost force, he infers it from the

tenor of Christ's admonitions to His disciples, that the call to martyrdom is a divine call; it is a summons on the part of God, calling upon His servants to bear testimony, on His behalf, before the world. Who shall disobey this summons, when thus it is uttered? 'Ye are my witnesses before all nations; and it shall be given you in the hour when it is needed, what ye shall speak.'

He who thus exhorted his brethren to hold fast their profession stedfast unto the end, did himself hold it fast: for although he did not actually die *in* martyrdom, he died *of* it. When a boy he had written to his father —who was then in prison as a Christian—'Be stedfast, and do not think of us:' a life of labour, penury, and suffering for Christ's sake, was his own commentary on this filial and generous admonition. From his master, CLEMENT of Alexandria, ORIGEN had learned the rudiments of that doctrine which he more fully expounds: It is, says Clement, from the love of God that we are to suffer as Christians. Having taken upon ourselves the name of CHRIST, if we shrink from the confession of Him, we are not called men of little faith, or of weak faith; but of none. Thus the Religious Obligation of Truth was interpreted to demand suffering for the sake of it, whenever the Christian was challenged to answer the question—Art thou a Christian?

From the pages of every Christian writer of the second and third centuries, passages might easily be cited, showing that, though differently expressed, this same principle was working itself forward into notice, until it should become the recognised law of the

Christian profession. 'Better for us to die, than to live, and lie to God.' In a condensed form it stood thus:—It is *I* who, unless I forego my hope of immortality, must now endure the scourge, the rack, the fire! It is *I* who must meet death, armed as it is with aggravated terrors! The question whether I shall face these terrors, or shall turn aside from them, is a question between God and my soul. My Christian brethren may indeed aid me, in some measure, by their plaudits and exhortations while I suffer; but they can neither suffer these torments for me, nor can they take upon themselves the future consequences if I fall away, and deny my Lord: they cannot be condemned in my place.

It was thus, and it was by a process of such extreme severity, and it was by the repetition of it in thousands of instances, through the lapse of more than two hundred years, that the most signal of all the revolutions which have marked the moral history of man was effected; and thus was it lastingly established. The time was come when the INDIVIDUAL MAN should be lifted up from his obscure place, as a unit in the mass of humanity, and should be raised to his true position, and be invested with his proper dignity, as related individually to God. It was thus, and it was amid the terrific horrors of the pagan persecutions, that the meanest of the species—the slave, the outcast—did at length secure for himself, and for his peers of all times and countries, a formal recognition of his worth and of his rights, as the equal—in moral estimation—of the noble and the learned. It was thus—even by the endurance of all

imaginable forms of misery on the part of thousands whose names have perished on earth, that we, of this present time, have learned to regard with religious respect, and patiently to listen to, whoever it is that, in the name of God, comes forward to profess his BELIEF—yes, or his DISBELIEF.

MARTYRS FOR A FACT; AND MARTYRS FOR A DOCTRINE.

THE removal of polytheism from the cultured mind was a great work; and yet the recognition and development of that Principle which assigns to man his true place and dignity, was a greater, and a more difficult work. Both were effected by the constancy of the Early Church; and both were effected by means of long-continued and most severe courses of suffering; and both sprung out of, and were inseparably connected with, a Definite Persuasion, as to the EVENTS of a preceding time, and as to the authority of a PERSON, and as to the authenticity of BOOKS.

Nevertheless the modern world has not come into the enjoyment of the benefits which were thus won for it by the Ancient Church, without a further conflict; and this conflict has even been more severe than the first, and also was of much longer continuance.

It might perhaps be possible to glean from the pages of classical antiquity as many as half-a-dozen sentences, bearing an *apparent* resemblance to those which are plentifully found in the early Christian writers, wherein the religious obligations of truth are affirmed. Yet even if it were so, the *facts* remain as they were; for what-

ever philosophers might have said and written, they had wholly failed to win a hearing for their doctrine among the people. Nor did any of the governments of those times ever recognise a principle of this sort: they understood nothing of the kind. As to the Early Church, it was as if the bare idea had never before presented itself to the mind of man. The battle had to be fought on ground every inch of which must be contended for; it was otherwise as to the assault upon polytheism, for on *this* ground a better theology had been long before propounded at least, although not accepted.

But when at length the Church, by which we mean the Christian Body throughout the Roman world, had achieved this great service, and had given expression to what may be called the Martyr Principle, there followed a consequence which was to entail upon the world a new catena of martyrdoms.

A consciousness of the sacred obligations of Religious Truth had given the ancient MARTYR his power of endurance; but then a spurious counterpart of this same principle followed very quickly, and it served to inflame the fanaticism of the PERSECUTOR. It was thus argued:—'If it be a duty we owe to God to profess the TRUTH—even at the cost of life, must it not be a duty of parallel obligation, to suppress and exterminate ERROR?' This inference, illogical as it was, did not wait long to be put into words, or to be acted upon. It became an almost universally admitted axiom. Shall we attempt to number its victims? Doubtless they have been a thousand times as many as those that had been immolated by the pagan authorities.

This false and fatal Inference, accepted so early as it was, came at length to be regarded as an axiom, which needed no proof, and which indeed admitted of none; for it was self-evident! If you would see in how cool and confiding a manner it is advanced, read the Epistles of Innocent III, and some of the sermons of St. Bernard.

If the mere exclusion of SUFFERING and TRIAL were the only consideration worth regarding, then one might be tempted to wish that the FIRST PRINCIPLE—the Martyr doctrine—true and good as it is, had for ever slept, unthought of, rather than that, in becoming known, it should have given occasion to the establishment of its spurious counterpart—the Persecutor's doctrine. But we are not at liberty thus to wish; nor may we thus reason; for everything about us shows that the higher destinies of the human family are not to be reached otherwise than through blood-sodden ways of suffering, extreme in degree, and drawn out through centuries.

It is—it must be, enough for us to know that the terrible results of the spurious Inference whence all persecutions have borrowed their apology, have not availed to deprive us of the inestimable benefits of the previous Truth. This Truth is now ours! it is ours as an inheritance, the encumbrances of which have already been discharged. Dare we relinquish this good? When we do so, a night that can have no morning will be before us.

But at this present moment WE—that is, we Christian men, are forbidden to entertain the thought of any such treason by those who (strange sometimes are the shiftings of position among parties) are vehemently, nay, are

even passionately, taking up the Martyr Principle—won for us by the ancient Church, and are pleading it in their own behalf, while they are making their determined assault upon this same Christianity! It may be well to listen for a moment to this new utterance of an old, but not obsolete, doctrine. How is it that the ministers of Disbelief screen themselves from rebuke? It is by taking to themselves, at a cheap rate, the Truth which the 'noble army of Martyrs' purchased for the world on the rack and at the stake!

A writer on the side of Disbelief professes his confidence that his reader will 'judge his argument (in disproof of Christianity) and himself, as before the bar of God.' In these words we hear the very tones of the Martyr Church. '. . . . . If Faith be a spiritual and personal thing; if Belief, given at random to mere high pretensions, is an immorality; if Truth is not to be quite trampled down, nor Conscience to be wholly palsied in us; then what, I ask, was I to do when I saw that the genealogy in the first chapter of Matthew is an erroneous copy of that in the Old Testament, and that the writer has not only copied wrong, but also counted wrong, so as to mistake eighteen for fourteen?'

Then, when a second and a more serious discrepancy presented itself, what course did this 'martyr' take?

'On what ground of righteousness, which I could approve to God and my conscience, could I shut my eyes to the second fact?' Again, finding Christianity utterly indefensible—'Would it have been faithfulness to the God of Truth, or a self-willed love of my own prejudices, if I had said, I will not inquire further, for

fear it should unsettle my faith?' To have stopped anywhere in this course of disbelieving would have been, in his view, 'sinful;' it would have been to 'plant the root of insincerity, falsehood, bigotry, cruelty, and universal rottenness of soul.'

I think one might easily have shown this writer, or any who may take the same ground, what he *might* have done amid such perplexities, which would have been far better than, on account of difficulties of this order, to renounce Christianity! But this writer thinks that, to have shrunk from his convictions, which ended in his entire rejection of the Gospel, would have been 'infidelity to God, and truth, and righteousness.'

If, indeed, the case be thus, then it is certain that this great principle of the *Religious Obligation of Truth* must not be abandoned by any of us. Yet we may listen to another witness, who speaks to the same effect, and he is one whose testimony is equally unexceptionable. He professes to admire the Bible; but he protests against its pretensions, as of divine origin, or as if it possessed any authority more than belongs to the Iliad, or to the Divina Commedia, or to the Paradise Lost, or to Shakspeare's Macbeth: he says, 'We may not lie to God. It may be convenient to let things alone; it may save cowards trouble to shrink from the responsibility of using honestly the faculties which God has given them: but it will not do in the long run; and the debt of longest date bears the heaviest interest.'

So thought the martyr bishop of Antioch, and the martyr bishop of Smyrna; and so the tens of thousands who, in their day, have trod the same thorny path to a

land which none shall reach who have 'lied to God.' Thus far then Believers and Unbelievers are agreed: yet let another witness be heard; and in hearing him one might think that his words are an echo that has come softly travelling down, through sixteen centuries, from some field of blood, or some forum, or some amphitheatre, where Christian men were witnessing a good confession in the midst of their mortal agonies! *This* witness is one who assures us that 'he can believe no longer, he can worship no longer: he has discovered that the Creed of his early days is baseless, or fallacious.' Yet he too takes up the same MARTYR TRUTH, that we must not lie to God. He is one to whom 'the pursuit of Truth is a daily martyrdom—how hard and bitter let the martyr say. Shame to those who make it doubly so! honour to those who encounter it, saddened, weeping, trembling, but unflinching still!'

Thus far then we are all of one mind—we Christians of this present age, and these our contemporaries, who denounce our belief as absurd, and they—the martyrs of the early time, who ascertained this same moral rule, and who, for our use, sealed it with their blood. We—believers and unbelievers—hold it as a fixed principle, as did the martyrs of old, that if we lie to God we consign ourselves to perdition, or to some unknown future woe, we know not what.

Yet there is this difference among us, and it has an ominous aspect.—

—We Christian men of this age, along with our venerated martyr brethren of the ancient Church, in making this profession—That we may not lie to God, nor deny

before men our inward conviction in matters of religion—we (as they did) affirm that which is consistent within itself, and which, in the whole extent of its meaning, is certain, and is reasonable, grant us only our initial postulate—that Christianity is from Heaven.

But how is it when this same solemn averment comes from the lips of those who deny that postulate, and who scorn to recognise the voice of God in the BOOK? It is just thus; and those whom it concerns owe it to the world and to themselves, to make the ingenuous avowal.—

—In the first place, the very terms employed by these writers, in enouncing the fact of the martyrdom they are undergoing, are a plagiarism, and nothing better! A claim, on behalf of the Gospel, must first be made of what is its own, and which these writers have appropriated, without leave asked. As to every word and phrase upon which the significance of this their profession turns, it must be given up, leaving these writers in possession of so much only of the meaning of such phrases as would have been intelligible to PLUTARCH, to PORPHYRY, and to M. AURELIUS. A surrender must be made of these Christian words, CONSCIENCE, and TRUTH, and RIGHTEOUSNESS, and SIN; and is it not so that these modern unbelievers must be challenged to give us back that ONE awe-fraught NAME which they have stolen out of the BOOK? When they shall have frankly made this surrender, we may return to them the τὸ Θεῖον of classical antiquity, for their future use.

Yet this plagiarism, as to terms, is the smaller part of that impropriation with which the same persons are

chargeable. As thus—It is reasonable, and it is what a good man *must* do, to suffer anything rather than deny a persuasion which is such that he could not, if he would, cast it off. So it was with the early Christian martyrs: their persuasion of the truth of the Gospel had become part of themselves; it was faith absolute, in the fullest sense of the word. The same degree of irresistible persuasion attaches to the conclusions of mathematical or physical science; but it never can belong to an *opinion*, or to an undefined abstract belief. A man may indeed choose to die rather than contradict his personal persuasion of the truth of an opinion; but in doing so he has no right to take to himself the martyr's style. So to speak is to exhibit—not constancy, but opiniativeness, or an overweening confidence in the strength of his own reasoning faculty.

Polycarp could not have refused to die when the only alternative was to blaspheme CHRIST, his Lord: but Plutarch could not have been required to suffer in attestation of his opinion—good as it was—that the Poets have done ill in attributing the passions and the perturbations of human nature to the immortal gods; nor should Seneca die in behalf of those astronomical and meteorological theories with which he entertains himself and his friend Lucilius.

When those who, after rejecting Christianity, talk of suffering for the 'truth of God,' and who speak as if they were conscience-bound 'toward God,' they must know that they not only borrow a language of which they are not entitled to avail themselves, but that they invade a ground of religious belief whereon they can

establish for themselves no right of standing. They may indeed profess what *opinion* they please, as to the Divine Attributes; but they cannot need to be told that which the misgivings of their own hearts so often whisper to them—that all such opinions are, at the very best, open to debate, and must always be indeterminate, and that at this time their own possession of the opinion which just now they happen to cling to, is, in the last degree, precarious. How then can martyrdom be transacted among those whose treading is upon the fleecy clouds of undemonstrable religious feeling?

Educated men should not wait to be reminded that those who, after abandoning a peremptory Historic Belief, endeavour to retain Faith and Piety for their comfort, stand upon a slope that has no ledges; Atheism, in its simplest form, yawns to receive those who there stand; and they know themselves to be gravitating toward it.

It would be far more reasonable for a man to die as a martyr for Atheism—a stage beyond which no further progress is possible, than to do so at any point short of that terminus, knowing as he does that every day is bringing him nearer to the gulph. The stronger the mind is, and the more it has of intellectual massiveness, the more rapid will be its descent upon this declivity. Minds of little density, and of much airy sentiment, may stay long where they are, just as gnats and flies ensnared upon the slimy sides of a china vase—they do not go down, but never again will they fly.

RELATIVE FORCE OF SCIENCE AND OF MATTERS OF RELIGIOUS OPINION.

THROUGH a strange misapprehension of what is the present tendency of things, within the precincts of Philosophy, those who are struggling to save for themselves the PIETISM OF DISBELIEF have made allusion to the progress of the SCIENCES, as if these were threatening the destruction of Christianity. We are told that our obsolete Creed will be rent from us by the advance of the Physical sciences.

A miscalculation it is that has led astray those who thus think, and thus speak. The modern Physical sciences—Astronomy, Geology, Physiology, have indeed availed to dispel from Christian Belief this or that groundless supposition, the demolition of which has occasioned pain to infirm minds, and has spread alarm among many; but the issue will be good and confirmatory. I may hereafter show you on what ground I think so; and I do not wish it to be supposed that I am either unmindful of the difficulties that have had their origin in this quarter; or that I am intending to evade the consideration of them. But whatever damage Science may do to Christianity, its operation (so strangely forgotten by the writers in question) will be, not to *damage*, but to put quite out

of existence, every phase of those vague pietistic notions which it may have been thought possible to retain, when Christianity is gone. The fate of all those varieties of speculative doctrine is already sealed, and it is sealed by the hand of our modern Physical sciences! How and why this should be taking place has not, I think, been understood; and I invite attention to it.

In any case when that which, on any ground of proof, takes full hold of the understanding (such, for example, are the most certain of the conclusions of Geology) stands contiguous to that which, in a logical sense, is of inferior quality, and which is indeterminate, and fluctuating, and is liable to retrogression—in any such case there will be going on a silent encroachment of the more solid mass upon the ground of that which is less solid. What is SURE will always be pressing upon what is uncertain—whether or not the two are designedly brought into collision or comparison. Whatever is well defined weighs upon, and against, what is ill defined. Nothing can stop the continuous involuntary operation of SCIENCE, in dislodging OPINION from the minds of those who are conversant with both.

A very small matter that is indeed determinate, will be able to keep a place for itself against this incessantly encroaching movement; but nothing else can do so. As to any of those theosophic abstractions, which we may wish to cling to, after we have thrown away the Bible, we might as well suppose that they will resist the impact of the Mathematical and Physical Sciences, as imagine that the lichens of an Alpine gorge will stay the slow descent of a glacier.

It is not that these Demonstrable Sciences are likely to be brought *designedly* into antagonism with the theosophies of Disbelief. But instead of this, these authentic sciences are now coming down, in one compact mass, upon all varieties of *mere opinion*: without noise, yet certainly, they are coming, to raze these from the soil where they grow. Travelling in its might, this solid mass will scrape quite bare the surface over which it travels. Nor is it merely the Mathematical and Physical Sciences that in this manner are edging opinion out of the intellectual world; for in the train of these come the Statistical, the Economic, and the Political sciences, which every day are assuming a more positive tone than heretofore, and are becoming more articulate than any Religious *opinions* can be, unless sustained by evidence of the most conclusive sort. Deductions that are indisputable—principles that have a near bearing upon the welfare of the community, not less than the higher truths of philosophy, tend to disengage the minds of men from whatever does not possess equal or similar recommendations. We sicken of endless surmises, of guesses, of aspirations, of impressions, of vague hopes. Now it is manifest that the Religious Disbelief which is at this time offered to us in the stead of Christianity, neither does, nor can, in the nature of things, take possession of solid ground whereupon it might establish and fortify itself. At the very best it is only a pleasing possibility, or a probability—it is a something better than nothing. Itself, from a consciousness of its own slenderness, it will be glad to slip away, unnoticed, from the halls of science.

This process, sealing the fate of theosophic beliefs of all sorts, does not indeed bear upon the masses of the religious community. Happily it does not; but it does bear upon the entire community of well-instructed men; and from them the effect which it produces is now spreading itself, outward and downward, and thus a paralysing of religious sentiment has gone far and wide; and this it is which calls for a fresh recurrence to the very substance of Christianity, as the only means that can be trusted to for bringing about a Restoration of Belief.

We must not allow ourselves to imagine that the relative position of *Natural* Philosophy and of *Religious* Philosophy at all resembles now what it was at the time when Christianity prevailed over philosophy and polytheism; for the speculations of that age did not stand liable to any such pressure from without, as that which now weighs upon their modern representatives. The *Theology* of that epoch was not at all less approvable to reason than was the Physical science of the same time: both were surmises only; and, on the whole, fewer absurdities were comprised in the *theology* than in the *science* of the times. The science of antiquity could call scarcely anything within its compass—*certain*, except its geometry and its applicates; nor was it itself in a progressive condition; it slept on its ground, and was not more likely to dislodge its neighbour—the Theology of the same time, than one of the pyramids is likely to shove another into the Nile.

It would be an illusion to imagine that any scheme of religious belief can *now* maintain itself in the minds

of instructed men, under the pressure of the compacted mass of our modern sciences. A most misjudging course, therefore, have those writers adopted who, of late, have threatened Christianity with an extinction, which, they say, is to be effected by the hand of the Physical sciences! Do they not see that there is a victim that stands first to be immolated—to wit, their own baseless theology?

But why may not Christianity itself share this same fate? Is it not itself *an opinion?* This *will* be the end of every one of those modifications of Christianity which have been devised for the purpose of escaping from its extreme consequences, or of mitigating its supposed severity, or of winning the favour of those who reject it. These varieties of what we must call an abated Christianity, *are* indeed opinions only; and they entirely lack intelligible evidence, as well as substance and motive force: they stir no affections; they fix no resolves; they breathe no such energy into the souls of men as should strengthen them in a course of real sufferings for the Truth's sake.

What is it then that may, and that *will*, hold its ground against the ever-increasing momentum of our modern philosophy? It is that CHRISTIANITY, whole and entire, which, filling as it did the mind and the heart of the EARLY CHURCH, carried it so well through its day of trial.

I now therefore reach the point which I have had in view thus far;—it has been my purpose to show that a Restoration of Belief, at this time, must be aimed at in making our way direct into the heart of the question,

and in reclaiming for the Gospel its own grandeur, its own beauty, and its own force, as a cluster of facts, not a congeries of notions.

Hitherto we have confined our attention to the martyr age of Christianity, and have considered how the men of that time, while they so 'fought the good fight of faith,' rendered a service to the world, the benefits of which can never leave it. But can any one persuade himself that this war could have been waged on the strength of any of those abated notions of Christianity which we are now required to accept instead of itself? We may be sure it *could not* have been so; and we know it was not so. The faith of the Martyr Church was undoubting in its quality, and ample in its compass. The martyr confronted his tormentor, and he welcomed death, in the perfect assurance that the Religion he professed was from Heaven, and that it had come into the world attested by Miracles.

Such a persuasion, we may think, cost this martyr little; for it was an age (so it is said) of ready belief. Men believed on slender evidence, or on none. It is of no consequence to dispute this: let it be granted. But if the credulity of the age made it easy for the Christians of that time to accept a religion professing miraculous attestations, this same willingness to believe sprang from a feeling, the vividness of which we, of this age, can scarcely imagine. The men of the martyr time had found in Christianity that which out-measured all miracles; to them the spiritual existence which they had drawn from the Gospel, was itself a Miracle with

which those of the Evangelic history seemed in perfect accordance. What they felt in themselves, and what they saw in others, of the power of the Gospel, was to them a resurrection, equivalent to the miraculous healing of the sick, or the raising of the dead.

But is it not 'reasoning in a circle' thus to believe the miracles because the religion is felt to be from Heaven, and to believe the religion, because it has been attested by miracles? Grant it that this *is* reasoning in a circle, when thus formally stated; but it does not follow that therefore the reasoning is not valid. A misapprehension on this ground has too easily been admitted, as well on the side of those who have conducted the Christian argument, as with those who have impugned it. A sophism, boldly obtruded on the one side, has been timidly dealt with on the other.

The very firmest of our convictions come to us in this same mode—that is, not in the way of a sequence of evidences, following each other as links in a chain, and carrying with them the conclusion; but in the way of the CONGRUITY of co-ordinate evidences, meeting or collapsing in the conclusion. This is not the same thing as what is called 'cumulative proof,' nor is it proof derived from the coincidence of facts. Those impressions which command the reason and the feelings in the most imperative manner, and which in fact we find it impossible to resist, are the result of the meeting of congruous elements: they are the product of causes which, though independent, are felt so to fit the one to the other, that each, as soon as it is seen in combination, authenticates the other; and, in allowing the

two to carry our convictions, we are not yielding to the sophism which consists in alternately putting the premises in the place of each other, but are recognising a principle which is always true in the very structure of the human mind.

Let the case be this—that you have to do with one who offers to your eye his credentials—his diploma, duly signed and sealed, and which declare him to be a Personage of the highest rank. All seems genuine in these evidences. At the same time the style and tone, the air and behaviour, of this Personage, and all that he says, and what he informs you of, and the instructions he gives you, are in every respect consistent with his pretensions, as set forth in the Instrument which he brings with him. It is not, in such a case, that you alternately believe his credentials to be genuine, *because* his deportment and his language are becoming to his alleged rank; and then, that you yield to the impression which has been made upon your feelings by his deportment, because you have already admitted the credentials to be true. Your Belief is the product of a simultaneous accordance of the two species of proof: it is a combined force that carries conviction; it is not a succession of proofs in line.

The same force of Congruity, not a catena of proofs, gives us the most trustworthy of those impressions upon the strength of which we act in the daily occasions of life; and it is the same Law of Belief which rules us also in the highest of all arguments—that which issues in a devout regard to HIM, by and through Whom all things are. On this same ground, where logic halts, an

instinctive reasoning prevails, which takes its force from the confluence of lines of reasoning.

I have asked it to be supposed that all we can now know of Christianity must be derived from the literary materials of the second and third centuries. But we now go back to those materials. They are various, if not of very great absolute bulk: they include contributions from the pens of fifty or sixty writers, some of these being voluminous, some amounting to fragments only, or paragraphs or sentences: but then, as to these Contributions, they are gathered from all quarters of the Roman World. These fragmentary remains bring to our hearing, as we might say, the voices of the dwellers in Palestine, Asia Minor, Egypt, North Africa, Gaul, Italy, and Greece; what we now listen to is a testimony coming in from a large surface. These variously derived materials constitute so many segments of a great circle; the centre of which they will enable us to determine, if only we rightly bring them to their places: the radii, projected from these segments, meet in a central point.

A striking unanimity of feeling pervades this mass; and yet this is along with much diversity of style—the temper of the individual men also being everywhere conspicuous, as well as the characteristics of country. The subjects treated of are various also. Nevertheless, as to the CENTRAL OBJECT of which these materials give us our idea, the uniformity—the Identity of Image is such, and it is of such intensity, that it moulds to its own fashion the mind of every ingenuous reader: he cannot refuse to yield his reason and imagination too, to this ONE IDEA: undoubtedly it is everywhere the same

PERSON whom he encounters in these scattered memorials of a distant time!

One of the purposes I have had in view in thus bringing forward the persons and events of the Martyr age, and in keeping the eye fixed upon that limited field, was this—to render more easy a mental effort by which we put out of sight the bearing of Christianity upon ourselves, and thus discharge from our feelings that which haunts our minds, namely—the thought that it may touch and disturb ourselves.

In now summing up, I entreat you to make this effort, and to imagine that Christianity has long ago ceased to hold any place of influence in the world; and that it stands before us only as a singular development of the religious and moral elements of human nature, which, having had its season, now stands on record, only as an insulated object of historic curiosity. If now you will go with me so far, ingenuously grant such things as you would not think of denying if you were relieved from all anxiety as to future consequences, touching ourselves. I will therefore suppose you to allow these following things.—

—That the Christian communities did, during the period that we have had in view, make and maintain a protest against the idol-worship of the times; which protest, severe as it was in its conditions, did at length win a place in the world for a purer Theology, and thus set the civilized races free from the degrading superstitions of the Greek Mythology.

—That, in the course of this arduous struggle, and as an unobserved yet inevitable consequence of it, a New

Principle came to be recognised, and a New Feeling came to govern the minds of men, which principle and feeling have conferred upon the individual man—however low his rank, socially or intellectually, a dignity that was unknown to classical antiquity; and which yet must be the basis of every moral advancement we can desire, or can think of as possible.

—That the struggle whence resulted these two momentous consequences, affecting the welfare of men for ever, was entered upon and maintained on the ground of a definite persuasion, or Belief, of which a PERSON was the object.

—That this belief toward a Person, embraced attributes, not only of superhuman excellence and wisdom, but also of superhuman POWER and AUTHORITY. If we take the materials before us as our guide, it will not be possible to disengage the history from these ideas of superhuman dignity.

If in any instance that can be thought to be parallel, the concentric testimony of many writers conveys the idea of a clearly-defined Individuality, such an idea, such a conception of a Person—real, and yet unlike others, *is* conveyed by the evidence now in our hands; and in this idea the *historic* and the *supernatural* elements are indissolubly blended; the two elements of character, as thus combined, possess a FORCE OF CONGRUITY which compels our submission to it as real. Whence then came this Idea? We find it on the pages of the early Christian writers in a form so consistent, and it is conveyed in language so sedate and so uniform, that we must believe it to have had ONE source.

Much do we meet with in these writers that indicates infirmity of judgment, or a false taste; yet does there pervade them a marked simplicity, a grave sincerity, a quietness of tone, when HE is spoken of whom they acknowledge as LORD. If there be one characteristic of these ancient writings that is constant and uniform, it is the calm, affectionate, and reverential tone in which the Martyr Church speaks of THE SAVIOUR CHRIST!

I am perfectly sure that, if you could absolutely banish from your mind all thought of the inferences, and the consequences that may result from your admissions, you would not, after perusing this body of Martyr-literature, fall into the enormity of attributing the notions entertained of CHRIST, as invested with Divine attributes, to any such source as 'exaggeration,' or 'extravagance,' or to 'orientalism,' or 'enlarged Platonism.' Exaggeration and inflation have their own style: nor is it difficult to recognise it: no characteristic of thought or language is more obvious. But you will fail in your endeavour to show that this characteristic *does* attach to the writings in question; and why should you make such an attempt? There can be no inducement to do so, unless it appears to be the only means available for escaping from some consequence which you dislike or dread.

But how can it be that a resumption of the inference which Christianity brings to bear upon ourselves, should rightfully affect the admissions we have made while that inference was held in abeyance? It can never be logical to say, 'I would not have granted you so much, if I had foreseen what use you would have made of my

concessions.' If our concessions have been reasonably granted, we must abide by them, come what may.

That which these concessions involve is this—that unless we at once allow the SUPERNATURAL and the DIVINE to have belonged to Christianity at its rise, our alternative is to fill up the void by aid of some hypothesis which shall give an intelligible account of what we know to have followed, wherever it was proclaimed, throughout the Roman world. As to any such hypotheses (four have been devised) I will not call them inadmissible, or insufficient; for to me they are wholly unintelligible.

Unintelligible are these hypotheses, even when looked at in the coldest manner from the ground of historical criticism. But how revolting do they seem when the course of events, through the lapse of centuries, is regarded in any manner that might deserve to be called philosophic!

The dark mysteries that attach to the course of human affairs, who shall profess to interpret? No one now undertakes such an office. Nevertheless we *may* trace single lines of causation with perfect certainty: we *may* follow a clue up from Effects to Causes; and we may discover causes which, in their quality and their efficiency, are such as the effect demands. We may safely reject, as by instinct, an hypothesis which assumes to trace great and extensive effects to causes that would be not merely insufficient, but which are utterly incongruous and unfit.

Remove from Christianity everything in it which is supernatural and divine, and then the problem which

we have to do with is this.—A revolution in human affairs, granted to be in the highest degree beneficial in its import, was carried forward upon the arena of the great world, by means of the noble behaviour of men who, by force, command our sympathy and admiration, as brave, wise, and good. But this revolution drew the whole of its moral force from a Belief which—how shall we designate it?—was in part an inexplicable illusion; in part it was a dream, and in large part it was a fraud! This, the greatest forward movement which the civilized branches of the human family have ever made, took its rise in Jewish brains, bewildered and diseased! Indestructible elements of advancement, to which even infidel nations confessedly owe whatever is best and most hopeful within them—these elements of good, which were obtained for us at so terrible a cost, had their source in a congeries of exaggerations, and in a mindless conspiracy which was hatched by chance—nursed by imposture, and winged by fanaticism!

While I must speak of the Theories that have been propounded for solving the problem of Christianity, on natural principles, in no measured terms, I would not be thought disposed to treat slightly the catalogue of difficulties that attach to the Christian argument, *at specific points.* Real are some of these difficulties; and some must be fatal to certain gratuitous assumptions, held on the Christian side: not one of them should be inconsiderately dismissed. But not one of these difficulties touches the Integrity of our Faith; nor can the entire mass avail at all to abate the confidence of our persuasion, that the GOSPEL OF CHRIST is from HEAVEN,

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and carries with it an AUTHORITY which Time does not impair, and which Eternity shall unfold and confirm.

When a collection of historic materials, bearing upon a particular series of events, is brought forward, it will follow (upon the supposition that those events have, on the whole, been truly reported) that any hypothesis the object of which is to make it seem probable that no such events did take place, must involve absurdities, which will be more or less glaring. But then, *after* the truth of the history has been established, and when the trustworthiness of the materials has been admitted, as we proceed to apply a rigid criticism to ambiguous passages, we shall undoubtedly encounter a crowd of perplexing disagreements; and it is probable that we shall find employment enough for all our acumen, and trial enough of our patience, in clearing our path. And yet no amount of discouragements, such as these, will warrant our falling back upon a supposition which we have already discarded as incoherent and absurd.

This then is the present state of the argument as to Christianity. As to those inroads which of late have been made upon the Belief of well-informed Christian men, they have been effected by urging exceptive cases, and by bringing forward instances of historic misplacement, or contradiction, affecting the credit of the Inspired writers; or, by inference, bringing into question the Divine authority of the collection of books. On *this* ground the course that should be taken, though it be arduous, is straight before us.

To propound difficulties pressing upon a Christian belief, is one thing; but to propose a THEORY that

might be properly accepted as affording an intelligible solution of the problem which demands to be dealt with, when we disallow the claims of Christianity as from Heaven, is a very different matter. On *this* ground, I do not see that any advantage has been gained on the side of Disbelief in modern times. Our English disbelief can pretend to no originality; for it is a copy after the German; and yet German theories, though they have broken down, in quick succession, at home, have been imported, as if still good, and have been done into English without scruple: is there one of these theories that has not been abandoned or discarded where it first appeared?

This is as it should be, on the supposition—That Christianity is true: the difficulties which adhere to the mode of its transmission may still be insoluble; yet to devote primary attention to *these* would only have the effect of giving our thoughts, as well as feelings, a wrong direction. A better course is, first to assure ourselves of the SUBSTANCE of our BELIEF: we may then, with comfort and advantage, meet the exceptive argument in its particulars.

THE CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT IS DETERMINABLE.

IT is said that Christianity must be content to take its place along with many indeterminate questions, which are, and which should be spoken of among reasonable men as 'matters of opinion.'

I deny this allegation; and I take my position, if with humility, yet fearlessly, on this opposite ground, namely: that, if those modes of reasoning which have been authenticated as good in other cases, are allowed to take effect in this case, there is nothing in the entire round of human belief more infallibly sure than is Christianity, when it is affirmed to be—RELIGION, GIVEN TO MAN BY GOD.

The same proposition, stated exceptively, might be thus worded. Christianity can be held in question only by aid of violence done to the first principles of reasoning, and by disregarding those laws of evidence which in all analogous cases are enforced.

I would not be misinterpreted in this instance. I might perchance undertake to demonstrate some unquestionable theorem in geometry, or to establish the most certain of the conclusions in the circle of the physical sciences; and I might so mismanage the process as in fact to make those things seem doubtful which, in truth, are absolutely certain. The question

just now, is not—whether an individual writer succeeds or fails in bringing a demonstrable argument to a true conclusion; for this may happen or not; but whether the argument itself be demonstrable or not.

Grant me therefore so much liberty as this, at starting, that is to say—allow me to fail in my present honest endeavour; yet let it be WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO MY CAUSE. Grant me this, and I will repay your candour with an equivalent. I shall impute no bad motives to you as a cover to my chagrin in finding that I do not bring you over to my side: I shall not tell you that your resistance to my reasoning is nothing but an immoral obduracy, springing from the corrupt wishes of an 'unregenerate heart.' It may be so in fact; but that is your affair, not mine. "Let a man examine *himself*." I am no Inquisitor, nor Father Confessor; nor do I profess to be a spiritual adviser.

Besides, I am not about to deal in persuasives, or to be eloquent and ingenious. I would not touch this argument at all if I did not find it solid in every part of it, and better than that it should need eloquence.

We all perfectly know that the only style proper to the exposition of absolute Truth is that which indicates no consciousness of the surmised dispositions, or adverse feelings, or prejudices, of those who are addressed. Euclid deals with everybody alike: he knows nothing of men's tempers. It is thus that, in working our way toward the truth of any mass of facts, debated in Court, we listen with all attention, as if an inspired person were about to speak, to the evidence of an intelligent and guileless child; for we suppose that this child does not

know, or knowing, does not care, how his statement will tell upon the suit, or how it may gratify, or irritate, or appal, the plaintiff, or the defendant. This child-testimony is just the normal style of a purely scientific treatise; and it should serve as sampler to an argument that is professed to be thoroughly honest and irrefragable.

A style much less inartificial than this has prevailed, on both sides, in the argument concerning Christianity. How this has come about on the side of Disbelief, it does not concern me to inquire. On the side of Belief it has had entrance in such ways as these:—Perhaps a writer who himself is *sincerely*, rather than *perfectly* persuaded, labours, from page to page, under the weight of a lurking uneasiness or misgiving, as to the goodness of the cause he has taken in hand. Or perhaps his amiable temper and his abhorrence of dogmatism, impel him to employ so many softnesses of language, and to abound so much in uncalled-for concessions, that the reader loses hold of an argument of which the writer himself seems to have lost his hold. Perhaps—and this is often the fact—the Christian advocate, being also a minister of religion, and in that capacity having much to do, from week to week, with the levity of the human mind, and its perversity, its indifference, and its obduracy, and thus forecasting the rejection of his argument—unimpeachable as it may be, draws back from a peremptory statement of it, lest he should risk too much in boldly challenging the readers' submission. He will not pledge Christianity where he foresees that he shall perhaps find a contumacious resistance.

Expect no such gentle obliquities in these pages. I am not provided with slender conventionalisms of this kind;—'Ought we not to grant?'—'Is it not reasonable to suppose?'—'Can we imagine this or that?'—'Every candid mind will allow;' and so forth. But then if I abstain from the use both of lenitives and of irritating stimulants, I protest against every sort of argumentative violence, or polemical outrage. What I mean by this protest is this—We are about to make our way, in company, through a mansion, the doors of which, inner and outer, are locked; but I carry a master-key in my hand. Every door opens instantly by application of these fair means. You must not then bring with you a sledge-hammer; as if you would be impatient of the use of the key. You must not bring forward, by preference, a violent supposition to avert an apprehended consequence. Only let the key take its course wherever it suffices, and I am content.

What then are the conditions of a proposition which should be regarded as a 'matter of opinion?' In connexion with an argument like this, the vague truism will not serve us—That an opinion is a proposition concerning which even the best informed men may differ without imputation, either of wrong motives, or of incompetency. On this ground, we need to be guarded against misapplications of the word.

A question concerning facts may be indeterminable in consequence of some hopeless deficiency of the extant evidence which relates to it; or ambiguity may attach to it in consequence of the occult quality of the facts in question. But any such indeterminate problems,

assignable, as they may be, to the region of *opinion*, and which are therefore open to endless discussion, are likely to belong to one, as well as to another of the departments of science, of philosophy, or of criticism. It is a mistake, fertile in errors, to imagine that OPINION belongs always to one department, and CERTAINTY to other departments; as if the immunities of an exemption from the tolls of controversy were the class-privilege of this or that aristocratic science.

Every science, how absolute soever it may be in its methods of proof, has its indeterminate verge—its open territory of opinion; so it must be while it is in a progressive condition. Until a science may pronounce itself to have reached its culminating point, there is always stretching out in front of it a region over which adventurous speculation takes its course, and whereupon no authority better than that of opinion has yet been recognised.

MATHEMATICAL SCIENCE is, we are told, still in progress; and, therefore, even over this region, or rather in front of it, there hovers the 'pillar of a cloud'—a cloud of promise, leading the way over the sands of the infinite, toward further conquests.

As to the PHYSICAL SCIENCES, if what has been ascertained within their compass would fill twenty folios—the matters next outlying beyond these, and which yet are sufficiently defined to be susceptible of some sort of intelligible statement, would fill a hundred folios.

As to those branches of science, or of criticism, which take their bearing upon INDIVIDUAL FACTS, and which deal with *Evidence*—no greater error could be fallen into

than that of supposing that, in any special sense, we are *here* entering upon the trackless region of opinion. In truth, as to the relative amount of the certain and the uncertain—of the determinate and the indeterminate—of that which is open to discussion, or is closed against it, and is sealed for ever as infallibly sure, those departments upon which evidence (in the technical sense of the word) bears, show a decisive advantage, as compared with the boundless domains of the physical sciences. It is so on two grounds:—*First*, as to the nature of the subjects respectively that are treated of; and *secondly*, as to the symbols, or the medium of conveyance, from mind to mind.

The Physical Sciences, inasmuch as they relate to the powers, properties, functions, of the material world—inorganic and organised, they touch the surface only of an abyss that is unfathomable. The things concerning which they treat are, more or less, occult, and, for a great part, they are inscrutable, as well by the human senses, as by human reason. Besides which, these sciences are compelled to express themselves in a medium which has been borrowed for their use, and which is very imperfectly adapted to the purposes it is now made to serve.

The prerogative of Mathematical Science is, that it has created its own symbols; and it has done this just as far as it has needed them: these symbols are quite exempt from ambiguity; and the truths conveyed by them are not attempted to be expressed a step further than they are thoroughly understood.

A parallel advantage attaches to the various depart-

ments over which EVIDENCE holds sway; for the facts—with few exceptions—are intelligible, and the medium of conveyance—that is to say, the language of common life, has itself grown out of, or is the product of this very class of facts. Language is at home when it is framed into propositions concerning individual facts that are sustained by evidence; but, on the contrary, it is doing a work strange to itself when it is giving expression to the generalizations of Physical Science.

So long as the Latin language lives it will always be perfectly known what sort of event was intended to be recorded when an accomplished nephew affirms, concerning his learned uncle, that—Innitens servulis duobus, assurrexit, et statim concidit: but when we turn to those of this same learned writer's pages in which he tries his hand at the scientific explication of natural phenomena, as of thunder-storms (ii. 43), or when Seneca gives his theory of earthquakes (Nat. Quest. iv. 5), we feel, *first*, that the things spoken of by these great men were immensely far beyond their cognizance; and *secondly*, that the terms in which they laboured to convey their own confused notions concerning these things are too indeterminate to have admitted, either then or now, any very certain interpretation. Nor ought we to assume very much more than this in behalf, even of our modern scientific speculations; for a time may come when a lecture, upon—let us say—the theory of volcanoes—even if the English language should live so long as a thousand years, may read like mere jargon; or it may require many pages of learned exposition to be spent upon it, before it can be known at all what the

writer could be thinking of when he talks about "a disturbance of the equilibrium of Galvanic forces," and the like. The *narrative* of the first eruption of Vesuvius—the *history*, is just as intelligible now, as it could have been eighteen centuries ago; and the letter of Pliny will retain the whole of its bright vivacity to the end of time; so that this one entry upon the page of universal history has a better chance for eternity than even the pyramids. But as to a large portion of our modern Physical Science—every century, as it passes, overlays it with a coating of obscurity, inasmuch as the theories of each era are superseded by those of the next; and inasmuch too, as the terms conveying such theories, having no real relationship to the things they intend, lose almost all hold of those things in the lapse of time, and cease to be easily intelligible. In respect of the events of the Trojan war—whether the Iliad be history or fable, the Greek language carries a meaning that is unchangeably certain for ever; but in respect of Aristotle's astronomy, or of Plato's scheme of the universe, nothing can keep the very terms in an intelligible condition—nothing but a running commentary which needs to be re-issued from age to age.

There is no ground then for setting off Christianity, to take its place among indeterminate questions—among 'matters of opinion,' merely because it stands before us as an entry upon the page of history; for it stands there in company with things that are quite as sure as the surest theorems of geometry. What it teaches—or some of those things may be, and are, matters of opinion; but it is not itself a matter of opinion.

You say—Christianity is an exceptive instance, because it comes to us laden with miracles, which no evidence can avail to authenticate; and in truth we are granting it more indulgence than it can rightfully claim, when we concede to it any footing at all upon the ground of rational argumentation. Let Christianity rid itself of the SUPERNATURAL, and then we will think about it.

. You cannot take this course; and my purpose at this time is to close it against you.

Authentic history comes into our hands along with a vast mass of adventitious matter, which is not *of itself*; and from which it may easily be distinguished without any damage to itself, or even much disparagement to the repute of the original writers. Of this sort are those statements of alleged facts for the truth of which the historian does not very explicitly pledge himself; and concerning which we may easily suppose him to have been innocently in error:—*also*—of this sort are his own opinions, his own reasonings, and his surmises, which are worth just what they may be worth:—*also* the entire mass of indirectly asseverated narratives—matters of tradition, matters of national belief, or of popular contemporaneous parlance.

Now, as to the connexion of all such extraneous matters with authentic history, I apply to it—for the purpose of my present argument, this phrase, and say—the tie between the two masses is that merely of ADHESION: it may thus be spoken of because a removal of the adhesive portions may be effected without violence: it may be done without drawing blood; and as to the

historian himself, he will scarcely be conscious of the operation. In how pleasant a manner have many such removals been effected in the instance of the 'Father of History,' who, in truth, as a veracious collector of facts, enjoys a much better repute among us now, than he did a century ago.

But there is another bond of union—connecting a body of history with what it brings with it, which implies more than mere adhesion, and which must be regarded as implying a connexion of COHESION. Whenever the tie is of *this* kind, an attempted separation of the two masses touches the life, and we should look well to the consequences before we set about it. I affirm that, in the instance of the canonical documents of Christianity, the connexion of the historic mass with the supernatural, is a case of cohesion; and that it is absolutely indissoluble.

When an instance of this sort presents itself, one of three courses may be taken:—that is to say, the three courses are *hypothetically* eligible; but which of them is actually so can be known only upon inquiry.

1st, It may be that we ought wholly to reject the conglomerate—the history and the miracle together, as being manifestly destitute of any intrinsic value.

2nd, We may apply force—retaining the simply historic mass, and throwing off the mass cohering. But when this is done the patient dies:—that is to say, the credit of the writer, or, in other words, his *vitality* as a witness is gone, even although much that he has recorded may still be quite true: we have slain the man;

nevertheless if he carried anything about him that is valuable, we take it to ourselves.

3rd, We may accept at once the simply historic mass, and that which coheres with it, both being true, and both historic.

The course of argument, therefore, in relation to Christianity, must be this:—In behalf of it, it should be shown, first—That the combination of the historical and the supernatural which it offers to our view is not an instance of mere adhesion; but is an instance of indissoluble cohesion.

We must then show that, unless violence is to be done to the principles that are applicable to the occasion, the commingled mass cannot be cast aside, as unsubstantial, or as destitute of value; inasmuch as the historical portion is of indisputable validity:—this is sure, if anything in history is sure.

But no endeavours, fairly made, can avail to disjoin the supernatural, in this case, from the historical. In other terms stated—within the compass of the canonical documents of Christianity the supernatural is one and the same as the historical. The *two* can be accounted *two*, by hypothesis only. Moreover the two elements—if they be two—coalesce into one mass, not merely by cohesion, of which just now I am to speak; for they are still more intimately blended by the force of CONGRUITY, to which I have already (p. 94) made allusion, and of which, hereafter, I shall have much to say. Whether or not the alleged cohesion of the historic and the supernatural may be incontestibly established, the connexion

of Congruity, laying hold as it does of the firmest of our convictions, stands entire; and it is such as has availed, and it will always avail, with the mass of unsophisticated minds, to ensure an unclouded belief.

The ground of argumentation, such as is now in hand, has been gradually narrowing throughout the course of the present half century. It is mainly the industry of adverse criticism that has thus cleared the way before us; or more fairly stated, it has been the assiduous antagonism of Christian, and of Antichristian scholarship, working with unwearied zeal at the same problems, that has achieved this service. On the one part, laborious ingenuity has spent itself in floating out threads which might perchance catch and detain, in behalf of Scepticism, this or that portion of the apostolic remains. On the other part, an overdone scrupulosity, and a superfluous candour, has employed itself in loosening the hold of these films—one by one.

The upshot of all this industry is just this, that, after two or three ambiguous cases have been allowed for, the apostolic antiquity of the several portions of the New Testament canon has come to be out of question; and that, as to the Epistles (with which alone I am at present concerned). The credit of these writings, as to genuineness and authenticity, rests upon evidence one tenth part of which has been customarily admitted as sufficient, in any parallel instance, on the field of classical literature. It must be mere affectation, or it must indicate infirmity of the reasoning faculty, to speak in any other tone than this of the result of those critical explorations of which the Canonical Epistles have been

the subject, in the course of the last fifty or sixty years.

As to any argument with which, just now, I am concerned, I should be content if there were handed over to me, only so many as four or five of the Apostolic Epistles—or even fewer, as undoubtedly genuine. Allow us anywhere good anchor-hold in the roadstead of apostolicity, and it is enough. It is enough, not merely because these fewer authentic documents carry by themselves an inference from which there is no escape; but because, as I shall show, a spurious writing, which is so like the genuine as hardly to be distinguished from it, will bear the weight of my present argument almost, or quite as well as it could, if it were genuine.

And then, after some such ambiguous document has yielded its available amount of evidence, in a *direct* manner, it serves a further purpose in giving support *indirectly* to what is genuine. The genuine shows the 'Hall-mark;' but the spurious, or the doubtful, carries a mark that is less authentic; and a comparison of the two 'stampings' affords the ground of new confidence, as to that which already we hold to be infallible.

With our English straightforwardness about us, and our dislike of the practice of catching at straws for the purpose of keeping a desperate hypothesis afloat, we take in hand a sample of German hypercritical captiousness. —It runs in this way:—'Throughout our Epistle,' says the critic, 'we find several words, and some combinations of words, that are not *Pauline:* they indicate another mind, and another hand. The forger, it must be confessed, has very nearly hit'—what? Paul's style!—

but not quite: he has done his work cleverly; but yet he has betrayed himself in not fewer than half-a-dozen places.

This Pauline style has then come to be—an HISTORIC REALITY—and as such I want nothing more; it is distinct, and distinguishable, by its individual characteristics, which are of so marked a kind that, while they held out a temptation to the ancient forger, they are of so peculiar a sort that modern critics are sure of their scent whenever an imitation is under inquiry. It is just thus that a practised collector of ancient coins applies his tongue to a specious 'Cleopatra,' or to a false 'Ptolemy;' for he knows the taste of the genuine Egyptian mintage too well to be so easily imposed upon:—the colour of the rust is nothing. The Critic takes a bearing upon that which is genuine (implicitly, if not explicitly) for the purpose of discarding the spurious. But I take a position *even upon the spurious*, that, from *that* vantage-ground, I may be able to trust myself with more confidence in accepting the genuine. As to any one in particular, of the twenty-one epistles of the Canon, the question of its genuineness and authenticity need not be entered upon until some critic, who shall be competent to the task, comes forward, in seriousness, and with copiousness of proofs, to affirm that *all* of them are forgeries. This will not be attempted; or if it be attempted, those who engage in such an enterprise must first make a clear field by erasing every remains of antiquity—profane and religious, anterior to the Norman conquest.

Nor do we now touch any question as to the alleged

INSPIRATION of these Epistles, or of any other books of the Canon. We are often told that we timidly hold up this 'Inspiration' as a screen, lest the documents of our faith should come to be dealt with severely, in the mode that is proper to historic criticism. Only let this Historic Severity take its free course, and Disbelief will be driven from its last standing-place. It is my perfect persuasion that, in the now actual position of the Christian argument, the doctrine of the INSPIRATION of the Canonical books is of more importance, in a logical sense, to Disbelief than it is to Belief.

If every one of the Canonical books of the New Testament — every one of those in behalf of which Inspiration is alleged, had perished, and if nothing were now before us but the *uninspired* documents of Christianity (those of the second century) I must still be a Christian, although I should often be at a loss as to the separate items of my Creed. But now, if the Canonical writings — Inspiration not considered, were dealt with in the historic mode, without prejudice or favour, Disbelief would wither from under the sun.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, IN RELATION TO THE PRESENT ARGUMENT.

THE historic element and the supernatural (the miraculous) are connected in the books of the New Testament in the way of COHESION, not of adhesion merely; but then this cohesion takes effect in a very different manner in different instances. These differences it is quite important to take account of; and it suggests a corresponding classification of the canonical documents. The Twenty-seven books take their places, when regarded in this particular aspect, under three heads; and thus we have—

I. Those, throughout the substance of which the historic base blends itself with the supernatural in the way of explicit and circumstantial narrative. These of course are the Four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles.

II. Those books in which, once or oftener, some explicit affirmation of the supernatural occurs; but which contain no circumstantial narrative of miraculous events. Of this sort are Seven of the Epistles.

III. Those in which we find no affirmation of this sort, and throughout which the supernatural makes no other appearance than that which is implicitly (though necessarily) conveyed in the primary article

of the Christian profession—namely, the Resurrection of Christ. This necessary implication always understood—the writer affirms nothing that is miraculous. As many as Fourteen of the Epistles come under this category.

In relation to the present argument the Apocalypse does not take a place in our arrangement.

The facts then which, under this aspect, stand before us, in outline, are these—That, out of the six and twenty constituents of the Canon, FOURTEEN are (as I here presume to call them) NON-SUPERNATURAL, saving only that one constant element—expressed or implied in *every* Christian writing—the Resurrection of Christ. Of the Twelve remaining books, Seven Epistles distinctly affirm, along with this universal implication, the fact of a miraculous agency *of which the writer professes to have personal cognizance.* FIVE, or, if the Gospel of Luke and the Acts be reckoned as one—Four, books not merely allege this agency, but narrate instances of miracles; and so relate them that the natural and supernatural elements constitute a continuous tissue, which is not resolvable into two, except by violence.

It is natural to place these three classes in the order here assigned to them; but the *logical* order, or that in which they offer themselves most conveniently for the purposes of a rigid scrutiny, ending in a peremptory conclusion, is just the contrary. I therefore begin with the Fourteen Epistles which, liable to the condition already mentioned, are here designated as the NON-SUPERNATURAL. These are—The Epistles—to the Ephesians—to the Colossians—to the Philippians—the two to the

Thessalonians—the two to Timothy, the Epistles to Titus, and to Philemon, and the five Catholic Epistles of St. James, St. John, and St. Jude.

This significant fact, that more than half of the authentic documents of a Religion which boldly rests itself upon miraculous attestations, contain no explicit allusion to such events, claims our strict attention. At a first glance this fact is susceptible of opposite interpretations; but its true meaning will be seen in attending to the particular instances in which it appears.

Manifestly, this tri-partition of the Canonical books is founded upon no *intrinsic* difference distinguishing them; but is accidental merely. The difference has no other reality than that which attaches to these compositions in their bearing upon the argument now in hand. It is to the same writer that we attribute five of the books of the second class, and nine of those belonging to the third; and between those of the second and those of the third there is discernible no difference of doctrine, or as to tone, or as to moral intention. Yet the one circumstance which constitutes the reason of this present classification is itself explicable, and it consists well with the assumption of the historic reality of the Christian documents. That fourteen out of these six and twenty compositions, or that fourteen out of twenty-one Epistles, should contain no affirmation concerning miracles, does not imply that miracles were not alleged by the teachers of Christianity;—for they are alleged, boldly and clearly; but it quite excludes the inference that these teachers were men of heated minds whose element was the world of wonders, and who would

always be labouring to propagate the same feeling in the minds of others, and to keep alive a species of excitement which is found to be peculiarly grateful to the mass of mankind. This fact, moreover, under the conditions which, as we shall see, attach to it, wholly excludes the supposition that the preachers of the Gospel were accustomed to indulge themselves in the supernatural wherever it was safe to do so; but that they cautiously abstained from any allusion to it where there might be a risk of provoking scrutiny and contradiction: the very contrary of this is that which presents itself: as we shall see.

The writers of these Fourteen Epistles—this is conspicuously evident—were neither striving to bolster up their own confidence by incessant references to miracles; nor were they endeavouring to sustain the constancy of their converts, by any such means. Their habit was—we do not *infer* this, but *see* it—to allege miracles whenever there was direct occasion so to do—and not otherwise; and therefore, though they make this allegation in *Seven* Epistles, in *fourteen* they do not make it. When an Apostle writes to his intimates—to his colleagues, and to those whose belief was a tranquil assurance, like his own—not a syllable of the supernatural meets the eye. But when he defies his adversaries, or rebukes a set of faulty converts, he takes his stand upon miracles; and yet even then a word of allusion to them is enough.

The Fourteen Epistles that contain no reference to the supernatural are attributed to four writers, namely, Paul, John, Jude, and James. The temperament of these

four writers is as diverse as can be imagined, and the style of each has no resemblance to that of the others. This dissimilarity of character being conspicuous (and it has often been insisted upon) the fact that the four are brought thus into company on the ground of their abstinence from the supernatural, in these Epistles, carries the more meaning; for it is evident that this abstinence did not draw its reason from the dispositions of the individual writer, but from an influence belonging to the Religion they professed, and which bore alike upon the four whenever the circumstances under which they wrote were similar, or similar in this particular respect. It has been customary to say—and we may always say it confidently—that God works no miracles without cause sufficient: and now it appears that these, His servants, make no mention of miracles—without cause sufficient. As in the Christian dispensation the supernatural was measured out by the necessity of the occasion, so are the allusions to it restricted within the limits of a rigid frugality.

JUDE.

I NOW take in hand the Epistle of Jude as if it were the solitary extant contemporaneous document of that Christianity of which I have seen and heard so much, while traversing the Roman world in the times of Trajan and the Antonines.

This Epistle is one of those which, through the commendable caution of the ancient Church, took its place among the ἀντιλεγόμενα—the 'controverted.' Not that

its *antiquity* was questioned; or its authenticity—in any such sense as is material to my present argument. The writer does not call himself an Apostle; and the Church hesitated to admit the claims which had been advanced in his behalf in this respect. Besides, such was the religious feeling of the Christian body, and of the critics of the third century, that because Jude, in two places, quotes, as genuine, two books that were held to be spurious, this apparent error was judged to be incompatible with his repute as an INSPIRED WRITER. Although an easy supposition—namely, that Jude cites, not those spurious writings, but some then extant remains, afterwards incorporated in the spurious books, might have obviated this objection; yet it so far had influence as to keep this Epistle under a cloud until some time in the fourth century. But with no ambiguities of this kind have I anything to do at present. That the Epistle is a writing of the Apostolic age, or the very early times, has not been reasonably questioned.

What this means is just this, that if those rules of historical criticism which prevail in the department to which the instance rightfully belongs are allowed to take effect, then the Epistle of Jude is a genuine document of the Christianity of the first century. Yet, even if it were nothing better than a good imitation of such documents, and we knew it to have been promulgated in the Apostolic age, it would serve our purpose as well.

The energy, the simplicity, the gravity, and the moral tone that are proper to a genuine writing, are manifestly the characteristics of this. It has, moreover, a graphic

force and a rotundity peculiar to itself. Looking to the Greek of this Epistle, you recognise the style of a writer who has tropical phraseology at his command, and whose cumulative manner and condensation indicate an intensity of feeling, which yet is governed so as is usual with men in places of authority, who, if they write with power, are careful not to compromise their position by a lax diffuseness; and while they show a stern countenance towards offenders, yet preserve the calm aspect of paternal love towards the better sort.

But the document in hand carries a meaning of a more definite kind.

Whether or not we choose to regard an affirmation of the supernatural as a dead weight which must sink any writing in which it occurs, no such weight attaches to the Epistle in hand. Indirectly, as I have said, the reality of the primary miracle of the Christian profession is implied; but the writer claims no power of working miracles for himself; nor does he in any way allude to occurrences of this class. There does not present itself, therefore, any hypothetical difficulty which should bar the way of the inference I have in view.

Thus far I suppose myself to know absolutely nothing concerning Christianity beyond that which I have gathered, by some industry, from the writers—Christian and Heathen—of the period above specified (p. 33). What I have so learned stands far out of the reach of controversy or contradiction. No scholarlike man would dream of attempting to bring the main facts here assumed into question. This various and volu-

minous evidence is, as I have said (pp. 49 and 101), a body of testimonies gathered from a surface geographically more extended than the Roman empire; and when it is thus regarded, the broadly-expanded mass is seen to take a concentric bearing upon that which must have been the common source of the whole. If indeed nothing belonging to that central point had come down to us, we must have surmised concerning it as well as we could; but if *only a single fragment* belonging to it reaches us, then, instead of vague surmises, we look to it in the warrantable expectation of finding that this piece, small as it may be, will show a true congruity with the mass which remotely bears upon it. The mason's chiseling upon this key-stone will serve to identify it as belonging to the arch.

Take notice then of my purpose, which is this:—in the course of an inductive scrutiny of the various materials in my hand, I am getting together, and am bringing to their respective places, the well-squared stones of a firm historic structure, to which structure, as I shall afterward show, the supernatural so coheres that the two elements can never be sundered; I mean, they can never be *fairly* sundered.

The community that was addressed in this Epistle was of some standing; for it had its stated observances, its ἀγάπαι, and there had been time for it not merely to develope its own proper qualities, but to draw toward itself—as a new and fervent religious body always does—men of cloaked purposes, who had found in it the means of gratifying their ambition, their cupidity, or their licentiousness. Yet this mischief, the constant atten-

dant as it is of every remarkable religious movement, was a recent occurrence; for the writer, who is a man in authority, had upon gaining knowledge of it '*hastened*' to throw himself in the way of its further spread—*πᾶσαν σπουδὴν ποιούμενος*.

These evil-purposed men had snatched at a doctrine which, when it is grossly apprehended by men of a sensual temper, seems to screen all vices. We descry in this instance the distinguishing feature of the Christian system (already known to us) that is to say, the free remission of sins, of which even the most profligate are invited to avail themselves. It is not against the immorality of the wide world that the writer inveighs; but against that of those who had abused a Christian profession in this very manner. This abuse had become rank in a degree to which a season of persecution would supply an effective remedy. But the season of general persecution had not, as it seems, yet commenced; for if it had come on, these vultures would have flown.

We found the Church of the martyr age in the attitude of a moral force, struggling to maintain a difficult position, closely beleaguered on every side by gross errors of belief, by abounding immoralities, and by virulent animosities. In the course of this struggle the Church was unconsciously coming into the possession of that fundamental principle of genuine morality—the sense of individual responsibility toward God. This germ of whatever is good, it brought out into act for itself, and then passed it down for the benefit of mankind in all time following. But we naturally look for the rudiments of so remarkable a revolution in the

original documents of the religion which gave it to the world; and it comes under our eye now in this Epistle. At a later time it was constancy in the endurance of sufferings for the truth's sake that had thrown the Christian upon his individual responsibility. In this earlier age it was constancy in resisting the insidious advantage of false doctrine, and of specious immoralities that had availed to the same end; and this constancy, as well in its later as in its earlier forms, had been animated by the same prospect of immortal blessedness. Thus are these springs of the moral life mingled in the closing injunctions of the Epistle. Towards delinquents a compassionate discrimination was to be used—the individual demerits of each being considered (verses 22, 23); while those who stood firm were reminded of their dependance every moment upon the help of God; and this caution is conveyed in terms which, within the compass of five lines, concentrate what is most affecting in Theology and in Ethics. As to this majestic doxology, we should lose more in losing the truths it conveys than in consigning to the abyss of oblivion the entire body of classical philosophy. "To Him who is able to guard you unfallen, and to make you stand before the glory (of his presence) unblamable in joy—to the one God, our Saviour, by Jesus Christ our Lord (be ascribed) glory and majesty, might and authority, as well now as throughout all ages. Amen."

Here then in this Epistle we find exempt from every exception—reasonable, or unreasonable, A CENTERING-STONE of that structure which, in the age of the Anto-

nines, had arched over the Roman world, from East to West, from North to South.

JAMES.

To which of the evangelic persons, bearing this name, and mentioned in the Gospels, this Epistle should be attributed, it is of no moment here to inquire; nor is it material to know anything more concerning the Epistle than that it is of very early date; of which fact, besides the references to it by Clement, Hermas, and others—the place it holds in the ancient Syriac version is sufficient evidence.

Notwithstanding a single passage of ambiguous import (c. V. 14, 15) I do not hesitate to class this Epistle along with the *non-supernatural*. The writer, among miscellaneous injunctions, gives one which by no means necessitates the supposition of what should be called a miraculous agency:—miracles were *incidental* and *extraordinary* (in their very import) but in this place a *customary occurrence* is referred to, and the *reason* of the course which the writer advises to be taken is drawn from a general truth, namely—the efficacy of prayer.

The force and vivacity of this composition, besides the comparative purity of the Greek, give it a very marked character. It resembles, except in a few phrases, none of those with which it is associated in the canon of the New Testament. The writer gives us a very distinct idea of himself, as well as a portraiture of the persons with whom he had to do, which is specially graphic. The indications of historic reality stand out,

one might say, with a harsh prominence on every paragraph of this Epistle. Nothing here has been smoothed down: there has been no revision of the first draught with a view to secure consistency, or to avoid giving offence. The writer must have known that his official position, and the weight of his personal character, would secure for him a hearing, how unacceptable soever might be the rebukes which it was his duty to administer.

To no community could remonstrances, and reprehensions, and pungent advices such as these seem flattering. They might perhaps be submitted to; but they could not be welcomed. The writer uses the tone of a man in authority—in office; and yet he does not labour to vindicate that authority; nor does he go about to sustain the pretensions of a sacerdotal class; he falls in with no prejudices; he does not flatter the overweenings of national or sectarian self-love. The Epistle bears upon its surface the straightforward purpose of a firmly constituted and fearless mind, opposing itself, at once, to open abuses and to specious pretexts. Nothing that is sinister —nothing deeper than the resolute intention of one who is jealous for truth and virtue, can anywhere be discerned among the sententious clauses of this composition.

We are free to take it for what it seems; but to take it in any other sense we are not free. We are no more at liberty so to do than we should be to put an ill construction upon the words or conduct of a neighbour against whom there is not a shadow of unfavourable evidence. This writer is not a man of the meditative turn: his modes of thinking are fixed; his views, so far

as appears from the Epistle, are limited; his habits and feeling show the practical, not the abstract tendency. In temper he is firm: or even severe; but yet he is discriminative; and toward the well-behaved he is indulgent and loving. He resents subterfuges; he is indignant at wrong. He does not work his way, by reasoning, toward a conclusion, but he seizes it with vivacity, and as by a moral instinct. His logic is of this kind—'Talk as you may, profess what you please, I know of only one sort of piety that can be acceptable before God, our Father; which shows itself in visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and in keeping itself unspotted from the (pollutions of the) world.—Whatever your theology may be, the wisdom which I acknowledge to be genuine and heavenly is pure, peacefully disposed, gentle, easy to be persuaded, abounding in works of mercy, and in fruits of goodness: —it is impartial, and abhorrent of disguises.'

Such is the writer; but the Epistle gives a brightly historic reflexion of the manners, tempers, usages, of the community, or class of persons that is addressed.

But now ought not a discreet Christian apologist to hesitate before he lifts the curtain? He will do so if what he is in search of, in antiquity, is a factitious image, or a fabulous social condition; but he will do no such thing if he be in quest of hard historic realities—not if it be his ambition to drive off from the Christian precincts the shadows, the myths, the quaint unintelligible hypotheses of German origin, in the mists of which English Disbelief is just now finding a momentary refuge.

Even if the writer of this Epistle had not prefixed to it the conventional phrase which designates his nation, "the twelve tribes of the Dispersion," we could have found no difficulty in recognising our company. It is certain that, on this occasion, we have entered the ancient Synagogue. The noisy congregation around us has, it is true, become professedly Christian; nevertheless in behaviour, and in moral costume, they are Jews, more than they are Christians. They are persons who have not undergone that melting down of the soul which took place in the instance of educated polytheists who, when they "turned from dumb idols to serve the living God," and when they awoke to the hope of immortality, passed under the transformations of a new spiritual existence. As to these synagogue converts, they had given up one religious persuasion, and they had taken up another. They had yielded the one point of controversial difference between the Synagogue and the Church; but they had retained their factious spirit, and their wrangling habit of discourse. They were expert in the twists and sophistries of rabbinical evasion: they were too ready to cry "Corban," whenever appealed to on the ground of mercy and piety. Between the obliquities of their Jewish training, and the simplicity of the Christian system, a perpetual conflict was going on. That characteristic of the community of which we get a glimpse in this graphic Epistle, is—restlessness—a want of equilibrium—a want of repose—a glaring want of consistency. One hears the clatter and the jar of a discordant assemblage of men who, as yet, have adjusted nothing in their own principles or motives. In a word.

—and it is a word full of historic meaning—we have stepped into the Synagogue!

These Jewish converts were skilled in those perverse reasonings by means of which men are wont to throw the blame of their many failures upon God (i. 13). They were glib in speech (i. 19), they were lagging in conduct; they were prompt to dictate (iv. 1), and slow to learn. Ready were they to cringe before the rich (ii. 2) but backward in administering to the needs of the poor (ii. 15). Such was then the license of the Jewish tongue, that the writer exhausts all figures that can be applicable to the subject, in labouring to set forth its unbridled excesses: a tongue, the incendiary intensity of which declared its rise in the nether furnace; a tongue—in one hour, taking its part in a liturgy, in the next pouring forth curses. These apt scholars of the Devil (iii. 15) slanderers, like their teacher (iv. 2) are dealt with in a way which nothing could sustain but the intrepidity of the most assured virtue and piety. We shall presently find the very same men (the likenesses are not to be mistaken) treated by another chief of the new religion, in his own style; but with the same fearlessness.

Critics have differed as to the country of the writer. It is of little moment to settle this point—of none just now. The people of the synagogue are much the same folk, wherever we find them. They were so, not merely from the prevalence and decisiveness of their national dispositions and habits; but because the individuals composing these congregations were migratory, carrying with them, of course, their peculiarities. Even now, in this synagogue in which we have taken our stand, there

are some who have but lately arrived from the ends of the earth; and there are also some who, at the moment when the sun goes down, will be busy at home, strapping their packages, and preparing to depart, at dusk, or at dawn, having already whispered to themselves the words reported by this writer, "To-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain."

The precise date, too, of this Epistle is controverted; yet, apart from reasons of a critical kind, and which favour a very early date, that peculiar moral condition of indeterminate conflict, between Jewish tempers, and Christian principles, which this Epistle brings so vividly before us, must, in its nature, have belonged only to a transition period; and we know, in fact, that, while Judaism speedily collapsed upon itself, Christianity soon ceased to wear this party-coloured garb; and everywhere showed its own mind, as the very contrary of Judaism. This Epistle would not comport with any state of things that was of later date than the Jewish war.

There is one point of accordance between the Epistle of Jude and that of James which we should not fail to notice. I have said (p. 99) that a remarkable uniformity of tone characterises those passages in the writings of the martyr age in which the personal attributes of the SAVIOUR CHRIST are alluded to; consequently this prime feature of the Christianity of the second and third centuries should show itself in every document bearing date in the apostolic times. And so it does in these two instances, and the fact is the more observable because in neither of them is the theological element distinctly

brought forward. The one writer speaks with a calm solemnity of HIM whom some, by their immoralities, had impiously denied—"our only Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ;" and the faithful are exhorted to "look for" the "mercy" of this SAVIOUR, "unto eternal life." The other writer, in the same tone, and with the same allusive brevity, speaks of the Christian profession as the faith of the "Lord Jesus Christ — (the Lord) of Glory." And he denounces those who, while persecuting the followers of this Saviour, were accustomed to "blaspheme that worthy name."

These two Epistles, then, the *historic reality* of which stands out of the reach of legitimate scepticism, and which possess, in themselves, a peculiarly well-defined character, constitute—apart—and together—a mass, indestructible in itself, and equal to any stress which—to revert to my masonic allusion—I may have occasion hereafter to throw upon it.

But suppose that, on the question of the genuineness and authenticity of these two Epistles, our critical evidence fell short, by a little, of irresistible demonstration. This imagined faultiness of proof (which, in fact, cannot be alleged) might indeed touch the question of the place that should be assigned to them in the Canon of Scripture: but it scarcely affects at all, if at all, my present argument.

I take, then, this Epistle of James, marked as it is with the inimitable characteristics of genuineness—as much so as any remains of antiquity that might be placed by the side of it. As to its *antiquity*, all shadow of doubt is removed, not merely by the quotation of

it by the early Fathers, as then well known to them; but by its presence in the Syriac version, in which the Epistle of Jude does not appear: these early translators found it already possessed of repute, as an authentic Apostolic work; and as such it had been ordinarily read in the churches of Palestine, using this language.

But let us imagine that these ancient translators, and that the Eastern Churches generally, had misjudged the case: in fact, that they had been imposed upon—for the Epistle, although spurious, bore so much the semblance of an apostolic work, that they did not detect the fraud. The forger—the imitator—the compiler, or by whatever epithet we should designate him, understood the manner of the apostolic teaching so well, and he knew so well what would be looked for by Christian readers in any composition purporting to come from an apostolic man, that he would expect only instantaneous detection if he admitted into his copy so much as one line which would be of ambiguous quality in relation to Christian morality. This imagined imitator of the apostolic style, after looking about him for samples, in order to choose the one which would seem the most characteristic, and which would be the least likely to awaken a suspicion, makes this sort of selection:—He writes an epistle, in the assumed name of James, for which he hopes to obtain currency among Jewish converts throughout the world; but this Epistle breathes an uncompromising moral intensity, and it abounds in sharp rebukes of that sanctimoniousness which was in fact the prominent characteristic of the Jewish people at that time!

What now does this mean but that the well-known apostolic style—the style which an imitator would think it the safest to attempt—was that of men who, full of the courage of God's own prophets, were wont to risk everything in behalf of truth and virtue? I do not see, then, that we should gain much on the side of Disbelief by suggesting doubts, in this same manner, as to the genuineness of the Epistles of the Canon: it would be better to let them pass at once for genuine and authentic. Apostolic Christianity, if looked at through its own crystal, shows the clear brightness of Heaven:—yet even if it were looked at in the copper speculum of spurious writings, it still carries a resplendence, not sensibly dimmed.

JOHN.

THE First Epistle of John stands among the ὁμολογούμενα of the ancient Church, the genuineness and authenticity of which are copiously attested. The second and the third were for some time questioned; but *these* are of no moment in relation to my argument, any further than this—that, if they be imitations, the absence of any allusion to miracles in them shows that this omission was quite *customary* in the Christian writings of the time.

There is not a word or phrase occurring in this first Epistle which could suggest the idea that Christianity had made its way in the world by the aid of miraculous attestations—the one foundation miracle always supposed. Yet at several points, throughout it, an allusion to miracles would have seemed fit and proper; espe-

cially where an appeal is made to that assurance of being in possession of truth which the writer affirms to be the privilege of all Christians. But the appeal is, in fact, to an interior vitality, not to any external demonstrations (iii. 14, 19, iv. 16, v. 10). The appeal is to a moral test, not to the supernatural (iv. 20). The witnessing on earth (v. 8) omits the witnessing by "signs and wonders." The ripened Christianity which this writer spreads out before us had no necessary connexion with any such attestations, which belonged to the outworks of the New Religion.

The writer last cited was seen to be in conflict—right and left, with an inburst of rancid Judaism; but at the time when the Epistle now before us was given to the Christian community this source of trouble was passing off into the distance; for the disturbers had discovered their mistake in thinking to connect themselves with the rising body; and they had retired. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us." (ii. 19.) At length the Christian body had become homogeneous; the leaven having duly worked itself into the mass. Yet human nature is always the same; and so it is found that these Teachers, however far the system they administered might have shifted its position, and how widely soever they might themselves differ in temperament, yet tread the same strait path whenever this same human nature, with its frailties, awakens their fears for the honour of the Gospel.

This sameness of feeling, and even of language, is the more observable, because, in this instance, it forms the

one link connecting two writers, who, individually, might be taken as samples of opposite tendencies of the human mind. The one, with knit brow, expanded nostril, firm lip, and outstretched hand—like the master of a ship in a storm—is intent upon the behaviour of his people, and is observant of the shifting tempest:—the other, with even front, and open eye, is gazing upon the cloudless vault of heaven, as if unconscious of earth, and always ready to leave it. And yet this contemplatist, whose own converse is with the unseen of the Christian system, so understands this system, and he is so alive to its bearing upon the conduct of its adherents, as to know that, if the sordid and factitious religionist slides off from the path of morality, on the one side, the sincere idealist—the man of meditation, is not unlikely to slide off from it, on the other.

Noticeable it is that, while the main drift of the one epistle is practical, and the spirit and tendency of the other is theological, yet, in the course of it, the writer lets go, and again takes up, his admonitory strain as often as seven times within the compass of so brief a treatise. He does this as if at the prompting of an undefined but strong moral instinct, which, ever and again, brings him down from Heaven to earth—alarmed lest he should have failed in any point of his duty, as a leader of the Christian community. James, with a ruthless hand, rends the mask from the hypocrite. John, with a loving solemnity, warns the mystically disposed against those illusions—those oblivions of the obligations of life, of which, so easily, such men are the victims. It is thus that the one Teacher rebukes the

perversity of the dogmatist—"What good is it, my brethren, for a man to say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith (*such* a faith) save him?" The other Teacher addresses himself to the sincere theopathist—lost perhaps in the meditation of ineffable perfections; but yet the two come into conjunction—as we say of the heavenly bodies—on the very same meridian of Christian charity:—the one says, "If a brother or a sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" The other says the same thing, yet in his own manner: "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Now at this point I decline to accept a customary tribute, rendered to the 'sublime purity of the Christian Ethics'—which 'we all admire.' This vapid homage does not satisfy the occasion. From a reasonable antagonist I require an acknowledgment that shall carry more of historic distinctness with it. It is very true, and there can be little merit in not denying it, that a high moral tone pervades the books of the New Testament without exception. But beyond this, if we possess that instinctive faculty which enables a reader to look into the bosom of a writer, through the glass of what he has written, then we must admit that, if any two of these writers, whose individual structure of mind was the most dissimilar, are placed side by side, there is seen, working at the depth of the heart of each alike,

a moral intensity—quick, sensitive, and always consistent in its utterance; for even if we are not always able to discern the coherence of their theological reasonings, we must always admit the harmony of their ethical conclusions.

This fact I shall turn to account in the course of my future argument; for it can never be made to consist with any of those futile suppositions under cover of which Disbelief is now taking shelter.

PAUL.

OF the fourteen Epistles attributed (and rightly) to Paul, as many as NINE take their place along with those already spoken of, inasmuch as they contain no allusion to miraculous occurrences, or to miraculous gifts. Of these nine Epistles four are addressed to individuals who were the Writer's intimates and colleagues. Five are congregational addresses, sent to those four Societies with the religious condition of which the writer was, in the main, well content. With these societies there was no serious controversy in hand; nor any personal contest, such as should make it needful for him to sustain his apostolic authority. The faith of these—his personal friends, and of these attached and obedient converts—was a faith, like his own—it was a "full assurance of faith"—a faith to which miracles could add no steadfastness. So it was that, when no motive suggested a reference to supernatural attestations, none appear.

But as to six of the nine that are now in view, they sparkle, as one might say, with historic crystallizations;

and every paragraph reflects something of the objects that were then surrounding the writer. John knew just so much of that world through which his pilgrimage heavenward lay, as might be forced upon his notice by urgent motives of responsibility toward the Church. Paul knew the world around him as those know it who are gifted with perceptions the most vivid. The persons, the transactions, the modes of feeling in the midst of which he was moving, he was as much alive to as were any, the most observant of his contemporaries. He has penned no graphic descriptions of oriental splendours, or of the Roman greatness; but as often as he needs a figure in illustration of his subject, he shows that he could have done well what he has not attempted.

I should think it mere pedantry to profess hesitation in accepting these nine Epistles as genuine. Unless it were to give proof of critical quixotism, no one would have gone about to show reason for any such doubts. But, just now, it is quite enough if only some of them are genuine; and that we accept the remainder as good imitations. The reasonings—if they deserve to be so designated—of those of the German critics who have laboured to bring the three pastoral epistles into doubt are of a sort that might well be adduced in illustration of a copious and not unimportant branch of intellectual philosophy—I mean, *nationality* in logic. Germans dive into the profound after a fashion which firmly constituted and cultured English minds resent as an insult to common sense. Upon the merest film of possibility the attenuated intellectuality of Germany soars away

through thin air. Between the not-to-be-translated mysteries of its abysses, and the infinite divisibilities of its heights, the mind of England finds no *terra firma*. A writer who undertakes the task of defending the canon of Holy Scriptures, as *inspired*, must needs meet and refute these refinements, even the last of them; but no such obligation rests upon one who carries forward an argument such as that which I have now in hand.

The pastoral epistles connect themselves, by some incidental allusions, with the Epistles of James and of Jude, for we find in them a portraiture which must at once be recognised.

A certain class of men, against whom one apostolic writer inveighs—to whom another gives battle, and to whom another transiently alludes, the writer of the three pastoral epistles so depicts as that they may easily be identified. They were everywhere found hovering about the infant society; and, being by temper and habit noisy and obtrusive, it would have been an error easy to be fallen into by an observant polytheist of that time, to have spoken of them as if they were true samples of the new religion, and to have drawn an inference to its disadvantage accordingly. We may just fancy the sarcastic author of the piece—ΠΕΡΙ ΤΗΣ ΠΕΡΕΓΡΙΝΟΥ ΤΕΛΕΥΤΗΣ—the Voltaire of his age, if he had lived a century earlier, to have encountered some of these men, and to have given us his pithy description of them. We may suppose him to say that he had met them in the streets of Alexandria, and at Ephesus, and at Antioch, and at Corinth, as well as at Rome; and he had also found them in Crete, which seemed to be their head quarters.

They are, he would say, voluble, contentious, acrimonious, virulent in their talk, obtruding everywhere the mystical dogmas of their religion; and cloaking always their real purposes. Insidious are they, and fertile in expedients for drawing the unwary into their trap; and all this is the means they use for filling their bags with money. I have found, he says, one of these huckster preachers, with his box of baubles slung over his shoulder, working his way into the courtyard of a great house, where he has contrived to draw the women about him—mistress and maids, whom he entertains with marvellous stories, and with more marvellous dogmas; while, at frequent pauses, he puffs the contents of his package, where you may find the aromatics of Arabia—the oils of Syria—the silks, the silver rings and chains, the gems (not worth a button) of India—the tear-bottles, the signets, the scarfs, the tiaras of Persia:—and all as worthless as this new philosophy itself—this 'marvellous wisdom of the Christians.'

Even Lucian, if he had written in this manner, must have admitted that those 'Palestinian priests and scribes,' who were, as he does say, the reputed authors of this 'philosophy,' had done their utmost to denounce these false adherents, and to expel them from the Society. 'A Christian bishop'—thus writes one of these Teachers—'must not merely be a man of blameless life; but of such energy also that he may be able to convince and to put to silence those disorderly and noisy persons—Jews chiefly, who, with sordid intentions, teach what they ought not. These are they who subvert whole families, and while they profess to know God, in works deny

him:—abominable are they and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.' The very same persons are they which one finds 'creeping into houses, and leading captive silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.' This plain dealing, and more to the same purpose, did not long fail to take effect. The men—as we have just seen—went off—declared themselves open enemies of the new religion, and acted as such thenceforward; and when they had taken this turn, we find them using the influence they had already acquired in every city with 'ladies of rank' to move persecution against the Christian teachers. Luke courteously calls these ladies 'devout and honourable women;' yet it is not certain that Paul, in a letter of pointed advices addressed to his friend, might not be thinking even of these, as the same 'silly women,' who, at the instigation of these Jews, moved the magistrates to make an ill use of their power, driving the Apostles from city to city, or leaving them without redress in the hands of the rabble.

It would have been of no avail, probably, to appeal to the candour of one like Lucian, or to his sense of justice, spreading before him these three pastoral epistles, as evidence that he had misapprehended the new religion. This anticynic was too thoroughly cynical in soul and temper to have listened to any such challenge, or to have placed himself within range of any generous emotions. But we of this time profess ourselves to be just, candid, and discriminating, and therefore we may be challenged in any case to give a verdict according to the

evidence, even although it be in contravention of our previous opinions and inward wishes.

What then are the conclusions which, looking to these three epistles—*and to nothing else*—are warrantable and inevitable?—looking to these three epistles, *and not looking away from them*, to the right hand or to the left.—

—Although they now stand in a collection of writings that are stitched in the same cover, this juxta-position is incidental only. They have indeed reached us on the same float, with other writings, but they obtained a lodgement upon it on a showing of their own merits, singly. Individually they have passed the ordeal of the severest criticism. The probability that they are not genuine is infinitely small. Even if one of the three were abjudged, it would still keep its place in argument, as a good imitation of the apostolic manner.

The pretext (illogical as it would be to urge it) that these pieces are damaged—historically, by an admixture of the supernatural, does not in this case find any sort of lodgement; for *here* there is no such admixture—the belief of Christ's resurrection being always allowed for.

But although it would be illogical to advance such an exception as this—inasmuch as the reality of the Christian miracles is the very question in debate—yet a valid reason would present itself for regarding these, or any other writings, suspiciously, if they pictured a fabulous condition of the social system;—or if it appeared that the writer, surrounded always by the golden haze of his own fictitious emotions, could never see things around

him as they are. Manifestly it is not so here:—human nature is plainly spoken of, such as it is, always; and it is cared for accordingly:—cautions, provisions, injunctions, varied and repeated, show that the writer was at once cool in his judgment, and practical in his views, as well as immoveably firm in principle.

These epistles are so admonitory in their drift and tone that, as to what might be the virtues of the Christian people of that time, we gather no information from this source. From Pliny's letter to Trajan we should learn more that is favourable to the purity of the Christian body, than we do from the whole of Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus.

We do not need the evidence of these three letters to establish the fact of the existence of Christian societies at the time alleged. But the purpose they do serve is to show that Christianity, as interpreted by the most zealous and intelligent of its first Teachers, held its place in the world as an earnest Remonstrant Force, opposed—not merely to religious errors, but to evasive pretexts, to illusions, to hypocrisies, and to immoralities—whether Jewish or Gentile. Especially was it a protest against the unintelligible jargon—the interminable wranglings, the sophistry and the impiety which its own energy, simplicity and grandeur had woke up, on every side of it, as its assailants.

If the mind of one of these writers seems at any time unhinged, while he is uttering his protest against these assailants, there is an ingredient mingling itself with these vivid passages which has a deep meaning. It is the characteristic of minds that are habitually tranquil

and conversant with what is great and pure, when they are summoned by a sense of duty to join issue with the lawless and disorderly of this world, to revert, as if with a rebound of the soul, to the loftiest themes;—as if impatient to escape from a scene of confusion, and regain the sanctuary of its happy and wonted meditations. Now it is remarkable that the most sublime and beautifully-worded of those doxologies, and of those condensed enunciations of eternal truths which illumine the pages of the New Testament, are found embedded in the very midst of warm remonstrant passages. In fact, within the narrow limits of these three epistles—the drift of which is mainly remonstrant, there occur as many as fourteen of these resplendent parentheses.

The very same indication of a spontaneous reaction is discoverable in the Epistles of James, and of Jude—both of them reprobative;—among these are some which stand unmatched in grandeur of idea, and in majestic simplicity of expression.

The Epistle to PHILEMON has often—perhaps often enough—been appealed to by those who have undertaken the Christian argument. Nothing can be more legitimate than such an appeal, if the question be—What was the writer? Was he such a one as a man must have become, after a thirty years' apprenticeship to illusion and unreality? To affirm this, or even to harbour such a thought at all, is not so much a wrong done to the individual, as an outrage upon human nature.

This letter breathes the tranquil rectitude of a mind

that is itself in perfect equipoise, and that is used to find its rest among the gentlest and the purest emotions. The epistle does not touch the supernatural, but it is in a genuine sense itself NATURAL in every phrase of it. An accord of truth vibrates in every well-attuned mind at the hearing of verse after verse. Even if the writer of this letter had not reminded his friend that he was—'Paul the *aged*,' we might surely have inferred this fact from that peculiarity of it which is its charm; for it shows the mellowed gentleness of a spirit that, at the end of years of labour and of suffering, has survived its vehemence, but has not outlived its sensibility.

In what way then does this Epistle avail us for the purpose of our argument? It avails peremptorily for excluding any of those suppositions touching the character of the writer which must of necessity be resorted to when—the merely historical part of Christianity being granted as real, the supernatural, thereto cohering, is attempted to be set off from it as spurious.

The two Epistles to the Christians of THESSALONICA are, according to the almost unanimous verdict of modern critics, of early date. A phrase occurring in the second paragraph of the first Epistle—*ἐν δυνάμει*, had at this time acquired a conventional sense, and probably it carried an allusion to those miraculous attestations of the Gospel which had attended its first promulgation in Macedonia. Otherwise, or beyond the insertion of this single word, these two Epistles do not contain a reference—direct or indirect, to any such events, as if they

were then occurring, or as if they had lately occurred, under the eye of the persons addressed. This absence of the supernatural is full of significance in this particular case.

Inconsiderately, in relation to the coherence of their own argument, those writers who have lately assailed Christianity have noised the instance of Paul's apparent error in regard to the near approach of the consummation of all things. It has been said, in a tone of exultation—'You say Paul was an inspired man; and yet we here find him professing a belief, in regard to which, as we now see, he was utterly mistaken.'

To this it would be enough to reply, that the Second of these Epistles—written in haste for the very purpose of correcting the mistake to which the first had given rise—proves in the most conclusive manner that the writer, notwithstanding the use of personal pronouns, did not himself entertain any such anticipation. The Christians of Thessalonica might easily have thought so; but herein they were mistaken. A proper inference also from this same instance has been drawn by Paley, in proof (if proof were needed) of the genuineness of the Epistle.

But a sufficient reply, on *my part*, would be this—That the objection, whatever may be its value, bears wholly upon the question of INSPIRATION, with which, at present, I have nothing to do. I am looking into these remains of apostolic Christianity in a merely historical light, and not at all as related to Theology.

Thus, then, let us handle this matter with all freedom, and see what use we can make of it, on either side. You

take the language of the writer in its apparent meaning, and therefore assume that, when he says—'WE which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord'—and again, when he affirms that 'WE shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air'—his mind was filled with the glowing idea of a near exchange, for himself and his converts, of pain, want, and humiliation, for eternal blessedness and glory.

Let this, then, be our hypothesis. Personally the writer was in a condition so helpless that, while preaching the Gospel, he was compelled to labour night and day for his daily bread; and at the same time he was undergoing grievous ill treatment, frequently at the risk of life. Those to whom he wrote—of humble rank mostly, were also enduring cruel persecution at the hands of their Gentile neighbours on account of their religion. Such being the present position alike of the Teacher, and of the people, he holds before them the belief that, midway in the tranquil hours of some day—not a day distant—earth itself should tremble at the blast of the archangel, and should echo the notes of the trump of God, and the shout of celestial myriads:—the Lord himself, with the hosts that wait his pleasure, drawing near to earth, and rescuing thence his faithful followers, carrying them off to immortal joys!

It was no wonder that simple people, if they thus understood (or misunderstood) their Teacher, should be much 'shaken in mind,' by such a prospect; or that, some of them, breaking away from their ordinary occupations, as unnecessary, and unbecoming their high expectations, should wander up and down—'working not

at all'—but busying themselves in everything rather than in their proper employments. This was quite according to the course of things, and some instances of a similar kind recently occurring, might easily be mentioned.

Yet it is certain that, as to the propagator of this perturbing belief, he had not himself in any degree lost the balance of his own mind. A tone of calm affection, and of subdued feeling—the consequence of long continued suffering—pervades both Epistles, and this first especially, which is distinguished also by the earnestness of its admonitions, as to conduct and temper, in purity, rectitude, sobriety, gentleness, and avoidance of every guise or semblance of evil.

If in any case we may trust to the constant principles of human nature, we may affirm that a mind which, while it is filled with anticipations of the most animating sort, is yet recollective of all proprieties, and is careful on those points of duty which are not of an exciting kind, must be a strong mind, not a weak one—a well regulated mind, not one that is habitually deranged by some conscious moral obliquity.

According to the supposition now before us, Paul was looking, every day, for a triumphant apotheosis of himself and his associates, amid the exulting shouts of the heavenly hosts;—and yet he shows himself to be as regardful of the obligations of this present life as if a dull century of its trials and labours had been guaranteed to him. No ingenuity will avail to make this idea of the man consist with any of those suppositions upon which we are thrown, if, while we accept the mere facts of Christianity (which it is impossible to deny) we attempt

to rid ourselves of the supernatural therewith connected; for those suppositions imply that the Apostles were men who strangely mingled in their mental structure, imbecility, extravagance, and a blunted sense of the obligations of truth.

But now I relinquish the advantage put into my hand by an inconsiderate opponent, and assume the contrary supposition, which indeed I take to be manifestly the true one—namely, that, in writing the first of these Epistles, Paul did not entertain the belief which, at a glance, his language might seem to express.

Then I ask, how was it that he did not entertain this belief? Ideas *of this order* were, as we see, actually present to his mind; and they furnished the grounds on which he took comfort for himself, and imparted it to others. Now, with minds imbued with religious conceptions, the tendency has always shown itself to bring down the supernatural, if possible, upon *the present hour*. Even highly cultured minds have been seen to surrender themselves to this powerful impulse:—'to-morrow, or next month—or next year, or such a year named, which *we* may live to see—these glories shall brighten the earth on which we tread.' Thus, from age to age, have sincere but unstable souls been wont to beguile themselves on the field of prophetical interpretation. Not so Paul (on the supposition now before us). And yet why not? If we say, because his mind was pre-eminently vigorous, and was always in the soundest condition; if this be the reply, I am content; and shall not fail to draw an inference accordingly. But if the reply be—The actual course of this world's affairs—involving a

slow development of evil principles, had been conveyed to him *supernaturally*, that is to say, by the teaching of HIM who alone is able to look on through the lapse of ages; then also I am content;—for such an answer (and it is the only true and admissible answer) embraces everything on the side of Belief. It is beyond my province to advert particularly to that prediction of the second Epistle by means of which the Apostle corrects the mistake into which his friends had fallen: nevertheless this prediction, by its boldness, its gravity, and the unlikelihood of its fulfilment, bespeaks its own reality. It has been said that this prediction, coupled with another occurring in the Epistle to Timothy, are nothing more than notable instances of sagacity, forecasting the tendencies of human affairs. Wonderful indeed would be such an instance of long-sightedness! but I should be apt to think that a mind which could thus penetrate the dark unknown of centuries to come, must have seen that a religion which *pretended* to be supernatural, and which yet was not so in fact, would soon exhaust its meagre resources, and would disappear. Is this, then, our supposition, that an intellect of so high an order lent itself to an enterprise which itself saw to be baseless and desperate?

The absence of any allusion to miraculous attestations in the Epistle to the EPHESIANS is a fact deserving of particular attention.

The nugatory exceptions of De Wette have at length been overruled, and the genuineness of this Epistle can

scarcely be said to stand liable to a shade of reasonable doubt. If we follow the arbitrary division of the Received Text, we have before us 155 clauses, or separable members of a continuous flow of thought. Of these verses 66 convey the writer's own fervent feelings, as in presence of the loftiest themes of Christian Theology: 89 verses are occupied, either immediately with pointed ethical injunctions, or with those reasons and motives that take a bearing upon the ordinary behaviour of Christians; but in not so much as one clause, or phrase, does the writer turn aside to mention miracles, or miraculous endowments. And yet there are two places in this Epistle in which such an allusion would have seemed quite natural. The first of these is (iv. 11) where the functions which were then in exercise in the Church are enumerated, among which the power of working miracles does not find a place; although, in a parallel passage of another Epistle (1 Cor. xii. 10—28), these miraculous powers are expressly named. The other place is that occurring toward the close (vi. 10, et seq.) in which the writer sets forth, in figurative language, the arduous position which those occupy who, in making profession of the Gospel, find themselves opposed to the crafty and to the open violence, not only of men around them, but of invisible adversaries—that were more to be dreaded. Against these powers—seen and unseen, the Christian soldier is exhorted to hold his ground, armed —the fanatic would have said—with Heaven's own thunderbolt, and with those 'fiery darts' which would bring omnipotence to bear upon the artillery of hell—not so, but armed, says the Apostle, with Truth, Recti-

tude, Peace, Faith, the hope of Salvation, and the Word of God; for these are the defences and the weapons which a genuine wisdom approves.

Quite of a piece with the spirit of this closing advice are the preceding admonitions, in the compass of which each of the principal points of homely morality is touched upon, in the plainest form of words, and in a tone of earnest solemnity. But I hear you say, sarcastically—'It appears then that the Christian folk of those apostolic times needed much looking to, as to their morals.' I reply—It *does* so appear; but then, if they needed it, we see that THEY HAD IT; and this fact is quite enough in relation to my present purpose.

What we find is this—That the first Teachers of Christ's religion, although they might forget, for a time, their own wonder-working endowments, never wrote a letter in which they forgot the main import of the religion which they preached; this purpose was to uproot the usurpation of Satan in the world;—and this usurpation was to be resisted by means that are purely spiritual and moral, and that are approvable to the highest reason.

The absence of the supernatural, in the instance now before us, has however yet another meaning.

The 66 verses already referred to, make up a cluster of parentheses, piled one upon another by the writer's fulness of feeling. He has almost forgotten his galling chain (vi. 20); he has quite forgotten the Roman soldier at his side, and the prison:—he has forgotten earth and its brief trials, as well as its pomps. As if with a seraph's wing he has reached the upper heavens, and

thence he measures—at a glance, the scheme of human salvation, stretching far back into the eternity past; and far forward into a bright eternity to come. On either hand of this shining pathway athwart the infinite, he sees a bright array of 'principalities and powers,' observant of this mystery of redemption—long veiled, and now revealed.

While thus musing upon objects so vast, was the writer's state of mind such as we moderns must approve, or not approve? Were his feelings—real, or were they illusory? If they were of the latter class, and if there be any coherence in human nature, meditations so lofty, indulged in by one who at the same time believed himself to stand near to the Supernatural—as we find he did, would infallibly have gone off upon this high ground;—here he would have exhibited himself as being in correspondence with heaven by means of those supernatural endowments which were at his command.

But how is it in fact that he descends to resume his terrestrial standing-place? He has just sealed his lofty meditations with a doxology; and then—a returning consciousness of the sombre things of earth takes this turn—'I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called—with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.'

Adhering then to our document, the case before us stands thus—On the one hand the brightest meditations did not lead the writer of this Epistle on toward the Supernatural;—they did not, BECAUSE HE WAS NO ENTHUSIAST: on the other hand, gloomy meditations

did not drive him toward the Supernatural;—they did not, BECAUSE HE WAS NO FANATIC. In one mood of mind or in another, he kept close to the course of practical wisdom and virtue—he did so because, in fact, he was in the highest sense, wise, virtuous, and sound-minded.

Toward the Christian people at PHILIPPI, Paul's feelings were those of warm affection, gratitude, and approval. The personal allusions in this Epistle, addressed to this Society, are of the most peculiar kind; and these, along with the mass of external testimonies, place it far out of the range of even the most captious exceptions. Once again then referring to my protest against *violence*, I affirm that—violence not admitted—this morsel of Greek, now under my eye—this six pages of antiquity, is as much a REALITY as is any other remains of past time which this present time conserves, and trusts to. If I may not say so much as this, show me clearly, in accordance with the authentic rules of historical criticism, why I may not.

In this composition the writer, who was then reaching the term of his labours—the religion which he had taught having by this time wrought the whole of its proper effect upon his mind—freely opens his heart to our inspection; and in doing so he incidentally conveys the elements of Christianity itself, and exhibits its bearing upon human nature.

Now I wish that we could read this one document of the Apostolic times as if not an atom beside had come down to us: let us take it as if it were our only means

of forming an opinion concerning that religion of which we possess copious information, such as it had come to hold a place in the world, in the age of the Antonines.

Whatever that breadth of facts required us to imagine, as belonging to the CENTRE FACT—the rise of this scheme, we find to be condensed within the limits of this one document. There is first, the mysterious dignity of the PERSON to whom, on every page of the later Christian writings, a reference occurs, in terms of grave reverence, and devout affection. LUCIAN, and other writers of his age and class, assure us that the zeal and assiduity of the Christians of his time in serving or rescuing one another was incredible.—*ἀμήχανον δέ τι τὸ τάχος ἐπιδείκνυνται, ἐπειδάν τι τοιοῦτον γένηται, δημόσιον . . . . . οἱ Χριστιανοὶ συμφορὰν ποιούμενοι τὸ πρᾶγμα, πάντα ἐκίνουν, ἐξαρπάσαι πειρώμενοι αὐτόν.* To us this need not seem strange, for the motives which prompted these labours of love had a foundation in a theology of surpassing intensity. The writer of this Epistle says to his friends at Philippi—'Let not, every one of you, be regardful of his personal interests; but let each be mindful of the welfare of others:—in a word, let that disposition be in you which was in CHRIST JESUS, who being in the form of God thought it no wrong to be equal to God; and yet emptied himself (of this dignity) and took the form of a servant;'—and this to accomplish our salvation.

It is testified abundantly, by their enemies, concerning the Christians of the martyr age, that they cheerfully submitted to spoliations, and were even prodigal of life. CELSUS mocks them on this very ground; he says,

though making much of the body in their doctrine of the resurrection, they were ready—when challenged to renounce their hope of immortality—*πάλιν δ' αὐτὸ ῥίπτειν εἰς κολάσεις, ὡς ἄτιμον.* This is as it should be, if they had truly imbibed the spirit of their religion as at first taught them; for Paul had said—'Yea doubtless I reckon all things as a loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of CHRIST JESUS my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead.'

PLINY assures us that he found the Christians of his province to be a harmless folk, binding themselves to do whatever is right, and to abstain from whatever is wrong. So it should be, for, from the first, they had been thus instructed. 'As to anything further, my brethren, (which I might wish to say, this is enough). Whatever things (in profession or behaviour) are true, whatever things are seemly, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are loving, whatever things are well-reputed, if there be anything of manly virtue, if anything praiseworthy, make such things your study.'

And thus, in the main, did Christians behave themselves in those times concerning which our information is ample—their enemies being their witnesses; and thus—as we now see, had they been taught from the very first. There is here before us an arch—all in one style, one jamb of which has its resting-place in the age of Trajan, the other in the time of Nero.

In this Epistle we find a lofty theology—a bright immortality, a pure and a *finished* morality, a loving

fervour, and a sharply struck individuality; but there are no miracles. Nevertheless there seemed room for one, inasmuch as the writer had looked for 'sorrow upon sorrow' in the dangerous illness of his attendant friend—Epaphroditus—a calamity he had not thought himself able to avert by supernatural means; for *these* were at his command *only* for a single and clearly-defined purpose—the attestation of his message. Granted for this one purpose, no allusion to them is found in epistles addressed to those who needed no such assurances.

' The Epistle to the Christians of COLOSSE presents the same elements, and sustains the same inferences: there is the same theology, as to the PERSON (i. 15), the same hope (i. 12, iii. 4): the same morality (iii. 5, et seq.): and throughout it, the same fervour and individuality. It presents, however, this further characteristic of the writer's temper and principles—namely, a decisive protest against that specious pietism which so easily enslaves feeble minds by its abstracted mysticism, and its ascetic practices, and its superstitious observances. Yet the writer had no contention with this Society; and the Epistle contains no allusion to miracles.

INFERENCES SUGGESTED BY A REVIEW OF THE NON-SUPERNATURAL EPISTLES.

It thus appears that these apostolic writers, though they much more often omit the supernatural than advert to it, are yet never found to omit the preceptive element in their addresses to their converts. They well knew that it is not by witnessing miracles that men are to be trained in virtue. Now, in this, I see that which may be likened to the course of a careful and industrious husbandman. He has been looking long upon his parched fields; but in a moment Heaven's flash lights up the landscape: Heaven's voice peals round the skies; Heaven's copious rain comes down—a life-giving torrent. This seasonable help from above the husbandman could not command; but now when it comes, it is his part to follow it up: he does not talk of the fertilizing thunder shower; but he goes to work upon his field with a new animation. So it is with the apostolic writers: they say little of miracles; but they say much of behaviour: they plant, they sow, they root up every weed: and it is God that giveth the increase.

Besides, these New Testament writers had read the Old Testament history; and they had gathered from it a lesson of wisdom by which they ruled their own conduct, as teachers of religion. They knew that the things

which had befallen the Israelitish people had been recorded 'for our learning,' and from this history they drew the inference that, although miracles serve to bring the teacher into his due position of authority as God's minister, the work on account of which he has been so installed has to be carried forward irrespectively of miracles. The Apostles were well conversant with those historical odes in which the obduracy of the people is the recurrent theme. They had listened to the verse, 'Marvellous things did He in the sight of our forefathers, in the land of Egypt: even in the field of Zoan;' and they had taken up the response—'Yet for all this they sinned more against him; and provoked the most High in the wilderness'—'they believed not his wondrous works'—'They forgat God their Saviour, who had done so great things in Egypt: wondrous things in the land of Ham; and fearful things by the Red Sea.'

That these instructive passages in the history of their nation were present to the minds of the Christian teachers we have their own repeated assurance (1 Cor. x., Acts vii. 51, xiii., xxviii. 25; and Hebrews iii. 7, 8, 9); and that they had put a true and wise construction upon these instances we have this palpable evidence, that, while their writings breathe throughout an intense fervour, directed toward the one object of promoting and securing the personal and social virtue of the people committed to their care, they do not in a single instance throw the stress of any ethical argument upon the supernatural attestations of their message. Throughout the Epistles morality is made to rest upon the solid basis of universal and permanent religious considerations.

I have said that the question of Christianity is strictly determinable. Up to this point it clearly is so. When the literary remains of the period already referred to—Christian—non-Christian, and anti-Christian—are taken as evidence of the existence, the wide extension, and the general quality of the new religion, instructed men will not be found to be materially at variance as to the palpable facts that are thus established. Among educated persons these facts are out of question, but they lead us back toward that moment when this religion was making its earliest assaults upon the religions around it, and upon the immoralities of the times. As the result of this quest for early materials we find some ten or twelve compositions, purporting to be official circulars, issued by the first teachers and preachers of the Gospel. These letters having come down from the time of their alleged production are amply verified in accordance with rules held to be valid in such cases; and they are submitted to the strictest scrutiny which modern criticism, in its mood of utmost severity, has been able to effect. This critical process has now been continued through a period of eighty years: it is not that the case is in itself ambiguous; but in fact each rising man, aspiring to practise in this court of criticism, is ambitious to distinguish himself by taking his share in a controversy that draws the eyes of the world, and he hunts the ground anew for pleas on which he may rest his reputation.

I am now thinking of those fourteen Epistles to which reference has been made in the preceding pages; which I have named the NON-SUPERNATURAL; but I

am next about to call your attention to the SEVEN, in which an affirmation of, or allusion to, miracles, somewhere appears. It may be well, however, in stepping across from the one class of writings to the other, to bring under your eye the proportion which the one bears to the other, in a more exact manner than in stating it, roundly, as two to one.

The Canonical Epistles, which are twenty-one, are broken up, in the Received Text, into 2767 verses. It matters not now whether this subdivision has been well or ill effected. Of this number a large proportion, which it is not easy to define, has reference to the circumstances or the history either of the writers, or of the persons addressed; and this is of a purely historic quality. This mass constitutes, in fact, a sort of *substratum*, firm in its adhesion, part to part, and available for any of those purposes which, in an argument on EVIDENCE, it is usual to accomplish by such aid.

Another portion of the mass—the quantity of which it is not important to ascertain—is occupied with theological disquisition, or argument, or with the enunciation of principles that are purely religious. About one thousand of the verses are either directly preceptive, bearing specially and pointedly upon the virtues and vices; or they are abstractedly preceptive, and properly ethical. Such are the injunctions—'Be ye holy (saith God) for I am holy'—'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;' and many of the same sort.

I now set off one chapter entire, which is *directive*, relating to the exercise of the 'gift of tongues;'—this passage not included then, of the whole number of

canonical verses, not more than SIXTEEN; or, if we include some contextual portions, let us say TWENTY verses, contain affirmations or allusions implying miraculous events—known to the writer, and for the reality of which he must be held to pledge his reputation. Presented, therefore, in the one mode, the proportion between the two masses is as two to one. Presented in the other form, which is the most exact, it is as one to 138.

Perhaps this state of the facts may not hitherto have occurred to you: but do not misunderstand my intention in thus presenting it. Do not imagine that I am clearing the ground, as far as I can, in preparation for a retreat; or that I am intending to creep out of the miraculous through a loophole of this sort.

In entertaining any such supposition you would do me a great wrong. What I am preparing the way for is an affirmation of the MIRACULOUS in the boldest, most ample, and uncompromising manner; but meantime this fact of the vast disproportion of the two masses—for which perhaps you were not prepared, as attaching to the epistolary part of the Canon, I hold to be fraught with a very conclusive kind of argumentative meaning; for it will not consist with any other hypothesis than this,—That, conversant as they affirm themselves to have been, with supernatural events, these writers—it is not one or two of them, but all of them—were right-minded men, and were in a most unusual degree exempt from the ordinary religious tendency to run into, or to run after, or to drive forward, those excitements which the Supernatural supplies.

I might now, when thus more accurately computed, bring forward the body of historic materials, using more than ninety-nine parts of it out of a hundred, which stand clear of every pretext of exception, on the ground of the admixture of the miraculous. This ninety-nine *per cent.* forms a body of vastly greater bulk than is required for bearing up, and for giving consistency to, the facts of the widely-based Christianity of the age of the Antonines. This central mass fully satisfies the conditions that are demanded by the facts belonging to the later period. All the phenomena of that period are embraced and satisfied; everything is explicable. The religion, seen at its rise, is seen to be a system of motives, principles, and precepts which we find to have been brought into act in the martyr age, over the extent of the Roman world.

The documents of the later time are so copious and so heterogeneous that exceptive criticism may be invited to do its worst without affecting any argument dependent thereupon. The documents of the inchoative period, though they are small in bulk, have come forth from a 'furnace of earth, heated seven times,' and they stand before us approved. The later dated and voluminous mass takes its bearing—groining down upon the centre column, and finding there its true support—whether considered as so much masonry, or as so much architecture; it is all solid, and it is all in keeping.

But now to affirm that this one *per cent.* of the Supernatural vitiates the mass in the midst of which it occurs, is just to beg the question upon which we are joining issue.

You say MIRACLES never have occurred, and never can; if so, those who affirm them must not be listened to.

But satisfy me in any way you please, either of evidence, or of abstract reasoning, that they have not, and then we are agreed. As to the evidence to which I appeal, it is immoveable; and as to your abstract reasoning, it is, in my view, nothing better than a transparent sophism.

THE SEVEN APOSTOLIC EPISTLES WHICH AFFIRM OR ALLUDE TO MIRACLES.

THESE are five of Paul's Epistles—namely, those to the ROMANS, the CORINTHIANS—first and second; to the GALATIANS, and to the HEBREWS (here assumed to be his) and the two EPISTLES of PETER.

These compositions, when compared with the FOURTEEN, are not at all of inferior pretensions, as to their genuineness and authenticity. One of them excepted, they are all critically good. Nor do they lock-in less firmly with the historic mass with which they stand connected. Four of these Pauline Epistles so cohere with the nine of the Non-Supernatural class that no critic would attempt to sever them. Read the two Epistles to the Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Churches of Galatia;—read them in the Greek, and do your utmost, as you go on, to persuade yourself that they are anything else than what they profess to be. Even the Tübingen Critics have here confessed themselves foiled. No scholar, unless he be crazed, would risk himself upon the sceptical side, in these instances. The same may be affirmed of the Epistle to the Romans. Upon this four, along with the Epistle to the Philippians which is

also allowed to be unassailable by criticism, or even hypercriticism, the entire weight of the Christian argument might very safely be thrown.

But I now take in hand that one of the Seven Epistles relative to which a divided verdict has been pronounced by competent critics:—I mean the Second Epistle of Peter.

For the purposes of the present argument, I regard it as if, on good grounds, it were supposed not to be what it professes itself; or to be, in some sense not easily defined—a spurious work. That it had become known throughout the East at an early period, and that it was publicly read in the Churches, is sufficiently attested by the mode in which it is cited or referred to, by (Clement of Alexandria?) by Eusebius, and by Jerome. The fact that, notwithstanding its intrinsic excellence, it stood so long waiting for admission into the Canon is one proof, among many, of the cautious manner in which the ancient Church exercised its discriminative function, as the guardian of the Sacred Text.

The Apostolic excellence of this Epistle is such that its exclusion from the Canon, if this were now to be effected, would inflict pain upon every devout reader of Holy Scripture: its characteristics are devout gravity, unction, and purity in its moral tone and aim. In a word, it bears upon its surface that inimitable air of calm majesty, and simplicity, which is characteristically *Biblical*, and which broadly distinguishes the books of

the Canon from all other compositions—especially from those of the age next following the Apostolic.

The supposition of the spuriousness of this Epistle may best be made to consist with this—its apostolic tone, by means of some such hypothesis as this—That certain genuine fragments of apostolic teaching had been put together, by whoever compacted the Epistle, into one; and that the interference of this fabricator went no further than merely to insert, between the fragmentary portions, some few connective phrases. The first verse therefore (on this supposition) may be untrue only so far as this—that it was not 'Simon Peter' who issued the whole, *in its present form.*

Any such supposition as this undoubtedly touches the *authority* of the Epistle, in a theological sense; but in relation to an argument which is purely historical, it has no significance. I will now take it up on the lowest supposition (which however is very far from coinciding with my personal belief) namely—That, from the first verse to the last, this Epistle is a forgery, or that it is an attempted imitation of the well-known apostolic style.

If so, then the imitation is so good, that, notwithstanding some critical difficulties, and the paucity, or inconclusiveness of the external evidence, it *did* in fact obtain currency at a very early time; and that it *did*, at a later time, make its way into the Canon. In modern times the air of truth and reality that belong to it have secured for this Epistle the suffrages of an evenly balanced array of critics.

This fabrication then (if such it should be accounted)

has been ably executed. Those who have decided against it, whether in ancient times or in our own, have admitted that 'it contains nothing unworthy of an Apostle:'—although differing in style from the first Epistle, it differs not at all in its tone and tendency, it is the same in doctrine and in morality.

Let us then put the facts together. How good soever the intentions of a writer may be, or mistaken his principles, it is not possible to attribute much moral sensitiveness to a man who sits down coolly to produce a forgery. Be his *aim* never so good there must be a flaw, or something worse, in the understanding of the maker of a lie, as well as a callousness in his conscience. A mind that is at once infirm and is vitiated betrays itself somewhere. An involuntary betrayal of itself may be set down as the inevitable consequence of an inward treason: or it will be so, unless some restraining force of extraordinary intensity be present to prevent it.

In the instance before us, what could be this restraining force, the operation of which was sufficient—as we see, to exclude from this fabrication every taint of the unhealthy condition of the writer's own mind? It can have been nothing else but a very vivid sense of the extreme delicacy and difficulty of his enterprise, as to its bearing upon morals. If there were but one phrase wrong, in *this* sense—if only a single clause savouring of laxity, it would be enough to condemn the whole, in the view of the Christian community; for all would exclaim—'It was not *thus* that an Apostle of Jesus Christ ever spoke or wrote.'

But I will put this supposition in a still more definite

form, as thus:—let us imagine that the real—though unconfessed—object of the writer was, under favour of an apostolic name, to give currency to the belief of the literal melting down of the material universe—'the heavens and the earth,' in the 'day of the Lord.' This startling averment, which is but slenderly, if at all, corroborated by other Scriptural declarations, the writer reiterates, in phrases a little varied, as many as three times within the compass of the same paragraph. He does this as if he were very intent upon his object, and wished to secure a due regard to it. Here, then, was precisely the hingeing-place of the whole piece; and at this point especial care was requisite.

Now this writer—well aware as he was of the feeling that pervaded the Christian community, and knowing, as he did, what it was that would be looked for in a writing purporting to be apostolic—skilfully *sets* his dogma, of the fiery doom of the creation, in the most authentic style, inserting between his two affirmations of it, this pointed ethical caution—'If then all these things (which now we look upon) are to be melted down (suddenly, and perhaps soon) what sort of persons ought you to show yourselves in pureness of behaviour, and in piety?' . . . 'But we Christians look for new heavens, and a new earth—which is to be the habitation of righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, inasmuch as ye are looking out for such things as these, be careful that (the Lord) when he comes, may find you in peace, unspotted, and blameless.'

It was thus, then, and in no other manner, that, in those early times, a spurious writing could be put

together with any chance of its passing among the Churches as an apostolic work. What, then, is the dilemma?—If this Epistle be genuine, then it is available, with its majestic simplicity, and its fervour, in proof of what was the temper and feeling of 'Simon Peter, the servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.' But if it be spurious, then it is available, in a sense even more *expressive*, and more *extensive* too, as indicative of the temper, the feeling, and the moral sensitiveness of the community, the suffrages and favour of which it courted.

If I cared for nothing but the argumentative *availableness* of this ancient document, I should be equally willing to accept it, as genuine, or to deal with it as spurious.

But whether genuine or spurious, it sustains alike a further inference. If it be genuine, then, in the near prospect of martyrdom, by crucifixion—Καὶ Πέτρος δὲ ἐπὶ Ῥώμης κατὰ κεφαλῆς σταυροῦται—which he mentions under the calm euphemy of a 'putting off this tabernacle,' the writer very pointedly affirms his latest confident profession of the Gospel, as true; and he pledges himself on the ground of his personal knowledge of its truth, in recollection of that hour, when, from out of the midst of the dazzling shekinah, the voice of the Most High proclaimed Jesus—the Son of God!

But if this Epistle be factitious, and if the writer was, as we see, perfectly aware of the conditions under which he might hope to gain credit for his work, then it is manifest that it had been the *known usage* of the Apostles to utter such professions of their personal concernment

with the supernatural events of Christ's life. Or state the case thus;—the supposition being that this second Epistle is a fabrication.—

This very significant fact has already presented itself to our notice, that—taking the apostolic Epistles *en masse*—the allusions to the Supernatural are very few; not being one *per cent.* as to *quantity*; and that these writers, more often than not, addressed the Churches without making so much as a single averment of this sort, direct or indirect. It is manifest, therefore, that it would have been a safe course for the forger of an apostolic letter to avoid everything of this kind: on the whole, it would have been the safer course of the two; and an astute scribe (he was no blunderer who got up this Epistle) would be very likely to keep himself on this safer side. But now, unless it had been the known practice of the Apostles, and of Peter especially, *at times*, if not often, to affirm their personal implication with the Supernatural, and unless there had been among the Churches a consciousness of this fact, it would have been to incur a risk of the most extreme sort to insert, in a letter bearing the name of Peter, a formal statement, such as occurs in the first chapter. We conclude thus:—

If the Epistle be genuine, then this aged Teacher of the Gospel, in the very last days of his life, affirms Christianity to be a supernatural dispensation.

If it be spurious, then it indicates the fact that such affirmations were customary with apostolic men.

The FIRST EPISTLE general of PETER. In this instance to advance, as if there might be any reasonable ground for it, the supposition of spuriousness, would be an impertinence. The apostolic antiquity of this Epistle is a fact out of question—I mean among those whose readings in German criticism have not denuded them of their English common-sense. Yet even here I might be willing—as to its bearing upon my argument, to take this Epistle as being, though not genuine, so like to a genuine epistle as to secure for itself universal acceptance as such.

The calm majesty, the fervour, the bright hopefulness, and the high moral import of the Epistle carry it home to every ingenuous mind as an embodiment of whatever is at once the most affecting in theology, and the most effective and salutary in morals. With those—if there be any, who have no perception of these qualities in the writing before us, I should not court controversy; for in any such instance nature must have dealt in a very parsimonious manner with a man's mind and heart, and sophistry must have robbed him even of his stint of reason.

But how does this Epistle connect itself with the Supernatural? What does it say of Miracles? Not one word of allusion does it contain to occurrences of this order, as then attendant upon the ministry of the Apostles. It is addressed to the dispersion (Christians, figuratively, or Jewish converts, literally) sojourning in the provinces of the Lesser Asia. Paul, in his course through these same countries had established the reality of his mission by 'mighty signs and wonders,' wrought

in every city on his track. In these provinces—or some of them, Christianity had prevailed over heathenism to an extent—so says Pliny—which must leave a very difficult problem in the hands of those who, in *their* theory of the spread of the Gospel, deprive its preachers of the aid of the Supernatural: it had spread and triumphed so widely, either without the help of miracles, or with that help. Take now the supposition which seems to you to involve the lesser difficulty. I must profess to think that in this case it is nothing but MIRACLES that can save us from the INCREDIBLE.

No such occurrences are however alluded to in the instance before us, and I draw an inference full of meaning from this fact; coupled as it is with another, which is of still deeper meaning.—

—The writer, in addressing an admonition to the Presbyters of the Christian societies, takes to himself the style which conveys the lowest of his claims so to address them:—he is a presbyter, as they are; and he is also 'a witness of the sufferings of Christ.' To these sufferings he makes a very distinct allusion, as often as seven times in the course of the Epistle. In each instance these allusions are woven into an ethical context, in such a manner as to be inseparable from it. Take the instance which occurs in the second chapter. The main purport of this chapter—as indeed of the entire Epistle—is hortatory, and it bears upon the conduct and temper of Christians, when called to suffer for their profession. Whatever in the Epistle is theological rather than ethical, comes in as an illustration, or as a subsidiary reason: these adjuncts there-

fore so cohere to the mass as to make an attempted separation of them impracticable.

Christians are fortified under the endurance of wrongful inflictions, by several considerations—mainly by a reference to the example of Christ, who so suffered, wrongfully indeed, for in Him there was no sin, no guile, and who, in silent patience, yielded Himself to violence, while 'His own-self He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.'

It is thus that the Writer—and in other places he does so in the same incidental manner—affirms and attests the death of Christ, of which he was a witness. This is not all; for as if to preclude subterfuge, he follows the released Spirit in its descent into Hades, and affirms what had been the purport of this entrance of the 'Shepherd and Bishop of Souls' among the Dead. A little further on, and when resuming the subject of the patient endurance of wrongful inflictions, he affirms that Christ, when 'put to death in the flesh,' entered—incorporeal—among the disembodied; visiting the region where they are detained—and there making a loud and authoritative proclamation; (on the part of God.)

With the theology of this passage I have nothing to do; nor am I careful to forefend inferences of any sort. I read the verses in their historic sense. A knowledge of the fact here affirmed, remote as it was from all cognizance of man, must have been given to Peter, either by Christ Himself, orally, after His resurrection, or it must have been conveyed to him at a later time, in some mode which *he* regarded as supernatural; and therefore authentic. If I were to describe to you the

things which would be found in a particular latitude and longitude, at the lowest depth of the Atlantic, I must make profession of having at my command some means of information that are unknown alike to common experience and to science. Peter affirms, therefore, in this case, that which involves and implies the supernatural, even more necessarily than is done in some narratives of visible miracles.

But he affirms also the resurrection of Christ, in varied phrases, five times in this Epistle. These affirmations are all of them adjunctive to his proper subject, and inseparable from the context. They include not only the fact of the resurrection; but that also of Christ's assumption to the throne of celestial dominion. (iii. 22.) We have here, then, in hand an instance of the COHESION of the supernatural and the historic which is of a peculiar kind.

In any composition if three, four, or five subjects, of different classes, are brought together, that one among them must be regarded as the one uppermost in the mind of the writer, in illustration of which the other subjects—two, three, or four, are introduced. That one is the leading subject; the others are the adjunctive and subsidiary.

According to this plain rule, the drift of this Epistle is ethical. The main intention of the writer, and his ruling impulse, was so to fortify the minds of the Christian people under his care, as should secure the purity, rectitude, and religious consistency of their conduct. In going about to make good this, his main purpose, he brings in those principal facts on which

the Christian profession rested, and in behoof of which Christians were liable to suffer. These facts stand *in series*, commencing with a merely historic fact—namely, the crucifixion, and the death of Christ—going on to those that were wholly remote from human cognizance, and coming to a close in the visible, yet supernatural fact, of Christ's ascent from earth to heaven.

Now this instance of indissoluble Cohesion may be dealt with, and it has often been so dealt with, in a style of extenuation or apology, as thus—'Can we imagine, or *ought* we to suppose, that a writer who is so careful to enforce moral principles, and who so well understands them, should himself, through life, be the propagator of what he must always have known to be a falsehood?' Reasonably we can imagine no such thing; but just now I should state the case in other terms, as thus—

—I bring this document into Court. In doing so I protest against any pleadings that take for granted the very question which is now to be argued, and upon which the plaintiff and defendant are joining issue. That question involves the reality of a series of facts, including those that are miraculous.

As to the genuineness of this particular document, it has already passed under revision, in the proper Court; and it has been duly counter-signed there, as authentic. It stands open to no exceptions that could be available for the plaintiff, only this one—that it bears upon the verdict in a sense unfavourable to himself. But this exception, of course, stands for nothing.

I read my document from beginning to end, and then

ask—'Excluding the plaintiff's nugatory objection, which is grounded upon his apprehension of an adverse verdict, would this Epistle suggest any other idea than this—that the writer's own mind was tranquil and well-ordered; and that his intention in writing it was of a sort which is becoming to a wise and virtuous man; especially to one who is in a place of authority?'

The answer is manifest. This Epistle, if read apart from any reference to the point now in debate, and if judged of *purely on the ground of its intrinsic merits*, carries home to our understandings and best feelings an irresistible impression of the goodness, wisdom, and simplicity of the writer. Search the entire compass of ethical writings, ancient and modern, we should not find even one that carries more decisively upon it the characteristics of sincerity and truthfulness.

Why then should *it*, or why should the writer be otherwise thought of? For no imaginable reason, only this, that, if we allow him his unquestionable due—then the plaintiff is very likely to be non-suited.

The genuineness of the EPISTLE to the HEBREWS, and the integrity of the Text, are admitted by the highest critical authorities. Its *antiquity* is vouched for, at once by the usual external evidence, and by several allusions contained in it to the services of the Jewish Temple; and which indicate its publication before the destruction of Jerusalem. As to the authorship of this Epistle, Origen's judgment may well be assented to—ὅτι, τὰ μὲν νοήματα τοῦ ἀποστόλου ἐστιν, ἡ δὲ φράσις καὶ ἡ σύνθεσις

ἀπομνημονεύσαντος τινὸς τὰ ἀποστολικὰ—and this allowed, it will take its place chronologically, in the last year, or two years, of the Apostle's life.

This composition is a theological treatise in its substance; an epistle only in its form. It is just so far personal in its allusions as to give the whole a more distinctly historic character than it would derive from its argumentative portions: The writer speaks once and again of himself, and of his colleague Timothy; and he administers rebukes, freely and mildly, to those whom he addresses, as if personally acquainted with their religious condition and their attainments as Christian people.

These attainments fell short, it seems, of what might have been expected, their opportunities of improvement considered; nevertheless it is manifest that the writer supposed himself to be addressing persons who, as well in their biblical accomplishments, as in the keenness of their intellectual habits, vastly surpassed that average of mental power and learning which is to be found in our modern Protestant congregations. A verse-by-verse commentary, aided by all the stores of our biblical erudition, is not more than is needed to give even a well-instructed and intelligent congregation a thorough comprehension of the reasoning of some parts of this Treatise. Those passages in it which, in their tone, rise above the temperature proper to biblical expository reasoning, are those in which the calmness of heaven's own atmosphere gives majesty to the language of the writer: of this sort are the opening verses of the treatise, and the middle portion of the twelfth chapter.

This Treatise—with its incidental allusions, its references to the then-existing Jewish economy, its refined trains of argument, its pointed admonitions, its tone of serious intensity—is, in itself, an HISTORIC MASS: it is a REALITY of the Apostolic times;—and as such it is competent to sustain whatever is found to be inseparably attached to it.

The persons addressed were thoroughly conversant with Jewish institutions, as also with the conventional sense of those forms of speech which had their source in the Old Testament Scriptures, and which had long been familiar to the Jewish ear, through the medium of the Greek version.

The writer, in his exordium, affirms the surpassing dignity of HIM to whom the new dispensation owes its origin; and having done so, he draws the natural inference, that a negligent regard to it will involve so much the more guilt and danger. This Gospel message which was first announced, he says, by the Lord, had been confirmed toward the Christians of that time by those who had heard Christ Himself—'God bearing witness (to the truth of their testimony) with signs and wonders; and divers powers, and bestowments of the Holy Spirit, according to His pleasure.'

To Jewish ears these phrases carried a conventional meaning that stood clear of all ambiguity: we have here authentic formulæ of the Old Testament, bringing recollections with them that embraced the staple of the national belief. Think what we may of the articles of that belief, these phrases recalled to the mind of the Jew of the Apostolic age, that long series of miracles

which had placed the people in a position of the nearest relationship with God. The words and the combinations of them are identical throughout the Old and the New Testaments,—Καὶ ἔδωκε Κύριος σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα μεγάλα ..... τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ τέρατα τὰ μεγάλα ἐκεῖνα .....: they occur frequently in the Pentateuch, in the Psalms, and in the Prophets. They had come also into current use in the Christian community, in connexion with events which were admitted to be supernatural, as appears in the Acts of the Apostles, throughout.

Thus it is then that, in the course of a lengthened argumentation which discusses or alludes to a round of religious topics, bringing the ancient and the new economy into comparison in various points of view, there occurs one, and only one, affirmation concerning miracles; but then this one is perfectly explicit; and it is so worded that the persons addressed could not misunderstand the writer. He affirms that those who had been the hearers of Christ, and who had reported the Gospel message to the Christian converts of the then present time, had, in delivering this message, received *the same sort of attestation* from God Himself which had been granted to Moses and the Prophets.

And as nothing vague attached to the wording of this passage, and as it stands boldly prominent in a context of peculiar gravity, so did it receive a more than ordinary weight of meaning from the circumstances of the persons addressed. It was to the Jewish converts who were still resident in Palestine, that the Treatise was primarily addressed, and through them, no doubt, to the same class of persons throughout the world. These

Palestinian Jewish Christians, among whom there were surviving some who themselves had listened to Christ's discourses, and had witnessed His miracles, were in a position materially unlike that of the Gentile converts in distant countries. Not only were they resident on the spot where the Evangelic history took its rise; but they consorted everywhere with those of their countrymen who virulently denied the Messiahship of Jesus. The alleged miracles of that history were rife matters of debate—in Jewish families—in synagogues—in the market-places—on the high ways—in the areas of the Temple.

How, then, do we purpose to deal with the fourth verse of the second chapter of this Epistle? There is no pretext for cutting it out of its place: it stands where it stands, unimpeachable on critical grounds. It attests the fact, *first*, that apostolic men—this writer at least—did not hesitate boldly to affirm the occurrence of miracles among those to whom the idea of such attestations of a message from God was intelligible and familiar. It establishes *also* this fact, that Jewish converts of that time customarily admitted the reality of such occurrences. If they had not done so there could not have been room for an unexplained and categorical affirmation of them, such as this is.

If the alleged miracles of that time had been very few, and these few of ambiguous quality, and if they had barely been recognised by Palestinian converts, there would either have been no allusion to them (as there are none in fourteen of the apostolic Epistles) or something would have been said of them in the style, either of

apology, or of asseveration. This simply worded passage of three lines would have been introduced or followed by a verse or two of oblique insinuation, or of evasion, saving a way of escape for the writer.

The question I put, in this instance, is this.—Supposing the alleged miracles of the Apostolic period to be real, then is not this brief, bold, and unambiguous reference to them just what is natural in the case of a writer who himself is conscious of truth, who knows that the phrases he employs carry a determinate biblical meaning, and who forecasts no contradiction?

This passage in this Epistle may be thrown out of its place, as to its historic import, only by supposing that the writer was a man of that class who, devoid alike of shame and of sensibility, allow themselves to use boastful expressions, at random, which are well understood to have no meaning—vauntings, which are the mere expletives of a rambling rhapsody, forgotten as soon as uttered, and disregarded when heard.

Tell me plainly, do you profess *this* to be *your* judgment in this case?

The EPISTLE to the ROMANS is also a Treatise rather than an Epistle; its authenticity and genuineness are out of question; or if you would fortify your English distaste of nugatory German criticism, acquaint yourself with that tissue of surmises on the ground of which the genuineness of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters has been questioned. The continuity of thought, running on from the fourteenth into the fifteenth chapter, and

thence to the end of the Epistle, is irresistibly conspicuous. The thought and the language are all of a piece, from the first verse to the last of this Treatise. Why then determine otherwise? For no reason but because the gratification of a pedantic ambition, and the craving for paradox, find a momentary occasion in an instance of this sort.

With the theology of this Epistle I have nothing to do at this time; nor with the ethical portions of it, unless to say, in passing, that, following as they do *as inferences* from the theology, they present to us an instance most remarkable, of an equipoise of principles, not logically wrought out, but springing from a harmony that is loftier and deeper than the range of mundane speculation.

But now find me anywhere a sample of practical good sense more striking than is that presented in the fourteenth chapter, and running on into the next. These six-and-twenty verses, if they had been duly regarded on every occasion to which they might rightfully have been applied, in the course of eighteen centuries, would have exempted the loaded shelf opposite me, just now, from the weight of at least ten of the folios of the ACTA CONCILIORUM. But great principles, when simply announced, demand cycles of time for getting themselves recognised—cycles as long almost as geological eras.

This EPISTLE, like the one last named, contains one, and only one affirmation as to Miracles, as events *then occurring*. But this one averment is, like that last referred to, explicit and bold, and it is unaccompanied by any expletive or extenuating phrases. It goes further,

however, in relation to my present argument, than the passage cited from the Epistle to the Hebrews. In that instance the writer does not affirm for *himself* the exercise of miraculous gifts: in this he does so very distinctly. In this Epistle 'Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ' stands before us in a clear historic light, connecting himself with the supernatural. Up to the time of writing it he had not made proof of his ministry among the Christians of Rome. He had long been wishing to do so, and he now believed that, at no very remote time, this, his Christian wish, might be accomplished; for after he had fulfilled his immediate intention of visiting Jerusalem, he hoped to make his way into Spain, and to see Rome in passing. His course of evangelic labour, hitherto, had occupied more time than, perhaps, he had calculated upon; for he had taken a very wide circuit in adhering to his rule, not to build on another man's foundation.

Thus he had gone preaching the Gospel throughout all the countries intervening, landwise, between Jerusalem and Italy. Many, in these regions, had listened to him, and had become 'obedient to the faith;' yet it had not been by preaching alone that these successes had been won; for it was by 'word and *deed*' that the people had been persuaded to forsake their idols. From 'Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum,' he had (everywhere and) in a complete manner, made proclamation of the Gospel; and in doing so he had given proof of the reality of his mission by 'mighty signs and wonders,' which Christ had wrought by his hands.

This noted affirmation has often been adduced by

Christian advocates; yet there may be room for me to bring the facts once again under review; as thus.—

The resort of Jews to Rome, and the access which they had gained for themselves to persons of all ranks, even the highest, had been the means of introducing many to a knowledge of the Scriptures, in the Greek version. Among these 'devout persons'—Gentiles by birth and habit, Christianity rapidly made converts; and unimpeachable evidence attests the fact that, in Nero's reign, the number of Christians at Rome was very great.

These Gentile converts were well conversant with the Old Testament history, and were accustomed to the recitation of the Psalms, and to the hearing of the Prophets. This sort of familiarity with biblical history, and with the phraseology of the Scriptures, undoubtedly belonged to those to whom were addressed the now extant non-canonical epistles of the first and second centuries.

Besides; the Epistle to the Romans itself furnishes abundant evidence of the diffusion of this amount of biblical knowledge among those to whom it is addressed, Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul now writes to these converts, announcing his intention to visit them shortly. He tells them that he had lately been employed preaching the Gospel in many provinces of the empire. He speaks, too, of the miracles that had everywhere given efficacy to his preaching; and in doing so he uses *that one set of phrases* to which the ears of the people had been long accustomed, and which, in their minds, stood connected with the notable miracles of the

Old Testament history. In using *this particular form of words*, Paul perfectly knew in what sense they would be understood when the Epistle was read in the Christian congregations of Rome.

These congregations, numbering hundreds of persons, if not thousands, were told that they were soon to see and hear this noted preacher of the Gospel, who, in his course from city to city of the Roman world, had wrought miracles of such a kind that the phrase 'mighty signs and wonders,' might with propriety be applied to them.

But at length this Preacher, he having appealed to Cæsar's tribunal, reaches Rome: he stays there a length of time: in what manner then does he meet and satisfy those expectations which he had himself excited among the people? This we are not told. But it appears that he found his countrymen there, or the greater part of them, ill-affected toward the new religion, and more disposed to listen to those reports to its disadvantage which had reached them, than to his arguments in its favour. An open breach soon takes place between the gainsaying Jews of Rome and this Preacher of the Gospel, who denounces, and in fact, defies them.

What would next follow may be surmised; but let us assume that the passage above cited in the Epistle meant nothing—or nothing that would bear inquiry: the words were a mere flourish—a rhetorical grace! Neither did this Preacher show any 'signs or wonders' at Rome, answerable to the kindled expectations of the people; nor did those who, from time to time, arrived

from the provinces he had evangelized, bring with them authentic or credible reports of any such miracles as those which the language of the writer implied. What effect so great a disappointment as this must have produced among the Christian people of Rome I will not venture to affirm. Let it only be remembered that these newly-professed Christians were of three classes, namely—*first*, Jewish converts having constantly to do, in their homes, with those of their countrymen who were virulently opposed to the Gospel, and who were now the irritated personal enemies of Paul; *secondly*, Gentile converts, from the populace of Rome, whose natural eagerness to witness 'signs and wonders' had been whetted by Paul himself; and—*thirdly*, a few persons of rank and education, about the Court, who, in compromising themselves with the new sect, even in the most cautious manner, had risked everything—life, as well as fortune.

In what way these several classes of believers were affected when, after a three or four years' suspense, they found that, in fact, no miracles were to be looked for in attestation of this preacher's mission, or in justification of his own professions, we do not know.

But what we do know is this—that, three or four years later, there were Christians enough in Rome to slake the ferocity of Nero—even the—multitudo ingens, of Tacitus.

Now this 'vast multitude'— or let us take the words in their lowest probable meaning, whatever that may be—had either professed Christianity at the time when

the Epistle from Paul reached them, or else there had been a great accession of converts during the intervening three or four years.

If we take the first named of these suppositions, then one must think it a serious matter (if we know anything of popular excitability) to disappoint the—multitudo ingens in regard to these promised supernatural attestations. Knowing that he must disappoint the multitude at Rome in this very manner, then the boldness of the language in which, only a few days after his arrival, he defies the Jews, and makes his appeal to the Gentiles, is indeed amazing. (Acts xxviii.)

But we now take up the second of these suppositions, and assume that, though the Christians of Rome had been few when the Epistle before us reached them, the —multitudo ingens had been "added to the Church" *after the occurrence of this signal disappointment*, and after the time when the gainsaying Jew had been put in a triumphant position, and was warranted in defying this Preacher to make good his written pretensions! Is this, then, our supposition? To me a belief in the Christian miracles is far more easy.

ONE affirmation only, concerning miracles, we have found in the Epistle to the Hebrews; *one* in that to the Romans; *one* in the Epistle to the Galatians; *one* in the second Epistle to the Corinthians. In each of these single instances the allusion is cursory; it arises out of the occasion, and it is firmly agglutinated with the context. Moreover to each of these instances there

attaches some special circumstance, rendering this sort of categorical averment in a high degree dangerous, if, in fact, it had been liable to any sort of exception. It was so, peculiarly, in the instance now next to be considered.

Throughout the scattered societies of GALATIA, and among a people remarkable for the fickleness of their dispositions, and for their proneness to be led and driven by demagogues, the apostolic authority of Paul had been set at defiance, or was openly impugned, while the doctrine he had taught was denounced. Up and down throughout this province, and scattered among its obscure towns, where they could not be followed, there were, as the writer of this Epistle knew, those who stood forward as his personal enemies, and who were ready to catch an advantage against him.

Nevertheless, in the bosom of these distracted societies there were some to whose better feelings he might still appeal—some there were who adhered to the evangelic doctrine—some who professed and contended for, the 'faith once delivered' to them. We must infer also from the expression ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν ..... that there was one Teacher among the Galatian converts who continued to maintain that foremost article of the Christian system which was its characteristic, as contrasted with the Pharisaic Judaism of the times, and which, in this Epistle, Paul expounds anew. The position of this one Teacher, in the midst of the general defection, must have been that of antagonism; and it was with him alone, as we may infer from the phrases used, that the power of working miracles remained.

The appeal made to the supernatural endowments of this one Teacher (if our inference from the form of expression be historically right) was in the highest degree fearless. But whether or not an *Individual* so distinguished, be here intended, or whether the apostle, though using the present tense, means to remind the people of his own ministrations among them, in times past, this brief challenge is in the style of one who feels that he risks no contradiction, *as to the matter of fact*; he says, Are ye then indeed so unwise? after accepting Christianity as a spiritual system, are ye now going back to a system of bodily observances? Has it then been to no purpose (as the professors of a spiritual doctrine) that ye have suffered so much (at the hands of Jewish fanatics) if indeed it has been to no purpose! Or answer me now this question—He (the Teacher) who now ministers to you the gifts of the Spirit, and who works miracles among you—*καὶ ὁ. ἐνέργων δυνάμεις*—is he a teacher of the legalizing doctrine? or does he not maintain the doctrine of salvation by faith, which I am now explaining to you anew?

This question followed hard upon a taunt, the pungency of which finds no parallel in the other Epistles of this writer, affectionate, and courteous too, as he is. He calls these Galatians *ἀνόητοι*; and he asks who it is that has so far abused their folly as actually to bereave them of their senses?

No inference which I judge to be important is dependent upon what may be a questionable paraphrase of this passage. The fact is enough that Paul, to whom the recollection of his miraculous powers does not ever

occur when he is addressing his attached friends, boldly affirms them, or affirms the same gifts in his colleagues, when he descends among his adversaries. This he does when, as in the present instance, he intends to keep no terms of amity with his opponents; and he does the same whether the tempers he had to do with were more or less virulent.

Note this fact, that those of the Epistles of Paul which contain affirmations of the supernatural, are those in which he encounters his adversaries, and administers sharp rebukes, even to his attached adherents. It is also to be observed that, when we name those of his fourteen Epistles which are the most distinctly marked with the historic characteristics of genuineness, we are naming also those in which he affirms the *present occurrence* of miracles. It is thus that the purely historic and the supernatural are, as one may say, inseparably riveted together in these writings.

It is the same in the two Epistles to the Christian people of CORINTH. If there be anything at all that has come down to us from antiquity — whole and unquestionable, these two Epistles will take a place among such ὁμολογούμενα; and if in any instance an ancient writer has spread himself out, and opened the door of his heart to our inspection, Paul has done so in these two Epistles.

I take up *first*, the second Epistle, containing as it does *one* passage that is applicable to my immediate

purpose. This is the twelfth verse of the twelfth chapter.

There might be room to think that the remarkable passage with which this same chapter commences, should also be named as an affirmation of the supernatural. It is so in reality; but it is not so in a logical sense; or as bearing out the inference upon which I have to insist. The sort of affirmations I am in quest of are those in support of which the writer *may* appeal, and *does* so, to the knowledge of those whom he addresses.

Paul, in this case, necessarily, affirms only what belonged to his individual experience: he declares that thus he had been favoured with two extraordinary revelations; but though the mention of them is proper to the occasion, they are not to be adduced as strictly available in the present instance.

Compelled as he was by the audacity of his opponents at Corinth to assert, and to vindicate, his apostolic authority, he reminds the people there of the circumstances that had attended his ministrations among them; and he says that, feeble as he might be in himself, he had in no respect shown himself inferior to the most noted of the Apostles; for the wonted attestations of an apostolic commission had been wrought (not simply affirmed) among them, with all submissiveness of manner ἐν σημείοις καὶ τέρασι καὶ δυνάμεσι. Here again we have the customary biblical formula, and in its more expanded expression.

We now turn to the first Epistle to the CORINTHIANS. In that one passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews which

links it to the supernatural, the persons addressed are reminded that *they* had witnessed miracles, wrought by those from whose lips they had received the Gospel message. In the Epistle to the Romans, the writer affirms of *himself* that he had wrought miracles in the course of his late missionary journeys. In the Epistle to the Churches of Galatia he appeals to the miracles that were then frequently wrought among themselves. In the second Epistle to the Corinthians he speaks of the miracles wrought by himself during his stay at Corinth. In this first Epistle he speaks, at large and particularly, and with perfect freedom, of the existence and exercise of miraculous gifts *among themselves.*

He tells them generally (i. 7) that they had been wanting in no gift—ἐν μηδενὶ χαρίσματι .... with which other Churches had been favoured. These gifts he specifies (xii. 4) mingling those which are ordinary with the supernatural; and this is so done as if to weave the two elements together in a fabric the materials of which should not be severed. 'To one among you is granted, by the same Spirit—wisdom—to another knowledge;—to one faith, to another charisms for healing, to another energies for mighty works—to another prophecy—to another the discrimination of spirits (or knowledge of character)—to another (the command of) several languages;—to another the interpretation of languages.'

Further on the writer enumerates—apparently in the order of their relative importance in his view—the functions which were constituted, and which were then in exercise in the Church; as thus—*first*, that of apostles;

next of prophets (or teachers), then instructors, or masters of classes. *After these* come the functions of those who were endowed with miraculous powers, gifts of healing—faculties of administration and management, and the command of languages. The order which prevails in these enumerations deserves attention.

Between this more general declaratory passage, and those injunctions which a disorderly practice had called for, there comes a parenthesis—an entire chapter—luminous with good sense: ought we not to acknowledge this, and to risk the consequence? If now it be Heaven's wisdom, of which we have such a sample, *supernaturally* granted to this writer, we need hold no further argument concerning Christianity. But if it be the writer's *natural wisdom* which here shines out, then how shall we make it consist with the supposition of the tumid extravagance of his mind; or of any imaginable condition of *conscious* falseness in his professions, or in his conduct? But we have to mark here that these thirteen verses, teeming as they do with the very substance of ethical truth, and exhibiting so correct a sense of ethical distinctions, come in as a corrective of that natural error from which we have found the apostolic writers to be themselves wholly exempt—I mean the error of thinking more of miracles than of morality—more of 'signs and wonders' than of temper and behaviour. If four or five of these gifted Corinthian converts had left us so many as one-and-twenty of their letters and treatises, I think we should not have found fourteen of them destitute of a single affirmation as to their own

command of the supernatural; nor the remaining seven, each with nothing more than a brief and solitary allusion of this kind.

But a word more should be said on this occasion. This thirteenth chapter of the Epistle before us is a parenthesis, linking the purely historic instructions which precede it, with other instructions, having relation to a misapplication of supernatural endowments. Here, then, we have the simply historic, or natural, blended and bound up with the supernatural, in such a manner as to defy the endeavour to separate the two. In the instances hitherto adduced I have noticed the iron riveting of these two elements: in the present instance I ask, Is not this tie a bolt of the purest gold?

The rule I adhere to is to lay no stress upon any matter that is controverted among well-informed and reasonable critics and commentators. Now a great cloud of difficulty has been made to settle over the subject treated of in the fourteenth chapter of this Epistle; so that what might seem quite intelligible when one reads the Greek without assistance, the same becomes an enigma, after erudite criticism has shed its best light upon it! Just now, therefore, I will say no more concerning the 'Gift of Tongues' than this—That Paul himself does manifestly regard this power as a miraculous gift; and as such he explicitly affirms his own participation in it:—rejoicing in the copiousness of the faculty which he exercised, he says—'I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all.' What was it then that he thus thought of with devout gratitude? Was it that knowledge of Hebrew (or the

Aramaic) of Greek and of Latin—which he had acquired at Tarsus in his boyhood? Or was it the power of pouring forth a mindless gibberish, intelligible to no tribe of men on earth?

It is enough that, in this passage, while the apostle exhibits his usual good sense, and his feeling of what is practically best, he speaks without hesitation of that which he regarded as supernatural.

CONCLUSION AS TO THE SEVEN EPISTLES WHICH AFFIRM MIRACLES.

I HAVE now taken in their order those documents of the Canon which contain an affirmation of, or allusion to, miracles, as currently taking place under the eye of the writer, or of those whom he addresses. I have especially given attention to those five Epistles of St. Paul which are distinguished from the nine of the same writer that are free from any reference to the supernatural.

I have pointed out three circumstances attaching to these Epistles which should fix our attention, namely, *first*, that they are those which, if there be any difference, stand the clearest of any suspicion of spuriousness; *secondly*, that three of these Epistles are those of the entire number—fourteen—which are addressed to societies that had harboured or listened to, the personal enemies of the apostle, and in addressing which the greatest caution was needed; and *thirdly*, that, if the first Epistle to the Corinthians be excepted—the affirmation of miracles is confined to a single utterance, which is brief, distinct, and peremptory.

I have also drawn your attention to the fact—that, in each of these instances, that authenticated form of words is employed in relation to which misinterpretation was impossible, and to which a clearly defined historical sense had come to be attached.

But I will now imagine that, instead of employing this biblical formula, which none of those who were accustomed to the Greek version of the Old Testament could misunderstand, St. Paul had gone about in quest of a phrase which might be susceptible of a rather less rigid interpretation: let us suppose him to have used a phrase of abstract coinage—bordering upon the philosophical, and which the better educated among his readers might so have interpreted as to leave a margin of indistinctness whereupon the writer might, at least in the view of *such* readers, clear himself of the charge of direct falsification. To me it seems perfectly certain that a religious leader in the position of this writer, if he had been conscious that the 'miracles' of which he spoke must, when narrowly looked into by his adversaries, melt away into anything or nothing—into mere exaggerations of natural occurrences—would have borrowed or forged a phrase adapted to his purpose; and that he would most carefully have avoided that particular form of words which, in the minds of all, carried an indubitable meaning of the largest import.

Let us now imagine that Paul, who had no narrow acquaintance with the resources of the Greek language, had employed, when speaking of the miracles that were lately wrought by himself or his colleagues, some one of those very phrases which his erudite countryman and

contemporary, PHILO, does actually use on analogous occasions. For example, if instead of the *τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα*, and the several phrases (all of biblical usage) which he *does* apply to his own miracles, he had given us a form like the following, with an evasive expletive inserted, *περάστιον δέ φασι συμβῆναι κατ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν χρόνον, μεγαλούργημα τῆς φύσεως* . . . . or that he had apologised for these miracles, as PHILO does elsewhere in his Life of Moses. If it had been so, there might have been room for a supposition for which, in fact, there is now no room. The biblical form, used when miracles of the most amazing kind are *intended* to be spoken of, had, in the apostolic time, come to be applied customarily to the miracles of the evangelic history; as appears from the Gospels. Moreover the same set of words occurs thirteen times in the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, always carrying the same indubitable sense. Once only, in speaking of such events, does the writer employ a different form (xix. 11), where it is—*δυνάμεις τε οὐ τὰς τυχούσας ἐποίει ὁ Θεὸς* . . . The form is the same in the Apocryphal books, as in the Epistles (Wisdom viii. 8, x. 16, Eccles. xlviii. 14)—in the Prophets; (Jerem. xxxii. 20, Dan. vi. 27)—in the Psalms; cv. 27, cvi. 7: and the Pentateuch, very frequently:—Exod. iii. 20, iv. 9, iv. 21, 28, vii. 3 . . . *τὰ σημεῖά μου, καὶ τὰ τέρατα ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ* . . . . x. 2, Num. xiv. 11, Deut. iv. 34,—*καὶ ἐν σημείοις, καὶ ἐν τέρασι* . . . . vi. 22, *Καὶ ἔδωκε Κύριος σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα μεγάλα καὶ πονηρὰ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ* . . . . . vii. 19, *τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ τέρατα τὰ μεγάλα ἐκεῖνα* . . . . . xxxiv. 11, *Ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς σημείοις καὶ τέρασιν.* . . . .

There are those who, professing to admire the cha-

racter of Paul, would gladly bring him off clear of the imputation of having compromised himself with the supernatural—if it could be done. Looking to these five Epistles, this attempt might perhaps have been made if only he had been careful to avoid this biblical formula, and if he had taken up, in its place, any vague abstraction of the kind of which samples enough may be found in Philo, in Josephus, and in several of the classical writers, when speaking of prodigies.

Let us now inquire by what means, if there are any, the supernatural might be severed from the mass of historic document to which we find it attached.

These means must be such as do not in any way violate the authentic rules of philological or historical criticism. An attempted violation of such rules could be prompted by nothing but an ill intention; and as in this argument I impute no bad motives to an opponent, I am saved the disagreeable necessity of rebutting any supposition of that class.

Now we first narrow our ground by putting out of view those fourteen Epistles upon which we find no particles of the supernatural adhering. We need not inquire how to exclude miracles from writings in which, in fact, none are affirmed.

These fourteen Epistles are of a purely historical character: each of them comes into our hands bearing its own credentials, separately from the others. Even if ten of them could be shown to be spurious, the others stand their ground; but instead of this, a mere shadow of doubt is all that attaches to two or three of the

number: and even these, as I have shown above, avail as much in argument, when imagined to be forgeries, as when they are admitted to be genuine.

Here, then, is foundation ample enough to sustain my Belief, as a Christian: I am willing to take my stand upon it; and never shall I be driven from this footing. If I have thoroughly informed myself concerning the Christianity of the age of the Antonines—reading the entire extant evidence—Christian and Antichristian—then, in these fourteen Epistles, I find whatever *should* be there, on the supposition that this great revolution which has placed the civilized portion of the human family on new ground, was real and true in its origin, and that it was THE WORK OF GOD. The *present* question then relates solely to those Seven Epistles which imbed our problem.

Now these might easily be disposed of if, in a critical sense, they were of inferior quality; but they are not so: on the contrary, they are those (one excepted) concerning which there has been, and is, the least difference of opinion among critics.

Or the supernatural paragraphs in these Epistles might be excinded if, on any ground that is recognised by legitimate criticism, these sentences stood as interpolations. But it is not so. On the contrary, as to most of them, these verses are woven into the context, before and after, and are one with the body of the Epistle.

And yet, even admitting the genuineness of these passages, we might incline to attach an abated importance to them if any one of the following supposi-

tions could be entertained.—If they occurred in those Epistles *only* which are addressed to the writer's colleagues, or to societies of whose attachment to himself, and to Christianity, he was perfectly assured. But the very contrary of this is the fact.

—If, instead of these few peremptory affirmations, we found a diffuse, turgid, and careless allusion to miracles on almost every page of the twenty-one Epistles. The contrary of this, also, is the fact.

—If, instead of employing, in these few instances, the well understood biblical formula, to which an historic sense had come immoveably to adhere, the writers had quietly let themselves down through the medium of two or three vague phrases, of which they might soon have found the type in several writers of that age. The contrary of this also is the fact.

The only remaining supposition which occurs to me as at all admissible, if our purpose be to set aside these passages, is this—That, as no miracles are *specified*, and as no narratives of this kind are given in these Epistles, it is not certainly to be inferred that the writers wished themselves to be understood in any very definite sense when they thus vaguely affirm such to have occurred. So we might perhaps suppose if no other Christian writings of the apostolic age had come into our hands. But an undoubted book—containing many such narratives, is before us. I abstain from an examination of this Book—the Acts—at present, and turn to it only for a moment, as it stands related to the supposition just named; and I affirm first—

—That the historical relationship of this Book to the Pauline Epistles has been so exhibited, in modern times, as should exclude all question as to the genuineness of either—the history, or the so related, Epistles: *secondly*—

—That, in this book, as I have already said, the formula which occurs in the Epistles occurs also—and as often as thirteen times, and in connexion, each time, with narratives of miraculous events. In what sense these phrases were understood in the apostolic times is thus put out of doubt by this employment of them in such a connexion.

I affirm, therefore, that the apostles do implicate themselves with the supernatural element of Christianity, and that they do it in the most formal and distinct manner possible; and that therefore it is only by violent means that the supernatural can be severed from the historical, as the two stand connected in the Christian documents.

What those means are which, in this case, ought to be regarded as 'violent,' and which should therefore be rejected, may easily be determined. To solve the problem of Christianity by *force* is to admit some supposition, or to listen to an imputation to which a cultured and well ordered mind will never reconcile itself; and which would never be advanced, at all, by minds of any class, except at the impulse of some urgent argumentative necessity.

I bring this to an issue thus:—

Make the effort requisite for putting yourself mentally

into the position of one who, as yet, knows nothing of Christianity. I put into your hands, in succession, the fourteen Non-Supernatural Epistles.—You spontaneously say of them, 'Whatever I may think of this *Theology*, which is so new and amazing, it is manifest that these writings embody, with great harmony of intention, an elevated and consistent morality; it would be well for the world if all men would receive it. It is also manifest that the writers, whether they be right or wrong in their religious belief, are sincere in their profession of it:—it appears also that they are sober-minded, and of good judgment;—it is clear that they are earnestly affected in relation to whatever is of undoubted importance, and that they treat slightingly what we all feel to be indifferent.'

Thus far, then, you will not affirm that any of those sinister imputations which you hold in reserve for solving the problem of Christianity, would spontaneously be suggested to you in the course of your New Testament reading. But you next peruse the five—above mentioned—Epistles of St. Paul; or you take up the Epistle to the Romans. In reaching the close of it you are startled to find the writer, with whose inmost thoughts you had become familiar, boldly affirming that, in a missionary circuit of several hundred miles, he had wrought miracles, in each town and city as he passed.

Under the perplexity that has thus arisen, I direct your attention to those several conditions attaching to this case which I have just above specified. These, if they are considered as they should be, and if we reject

unintelligible evasions—myths, and shifts;—rejecting, in fact, what a well constituted English mind must and will reject as frivolous, impertinent, vaporous, and absurd, then our alternative is just this.—

To yield our belief to Christianity, as a supernatural dispensation;—or, To suppose—I do not well know how to put such a supposition into words—that the apostolic men, not one of them, but all, stand as a class by themselves, of which no other samples have occurred among the myriad varieties of the species: for they are wise, and they are mad: they are always virtuous, and they are always wicked: they are prudent and they are absurd; and they are both these in an extreme degree. They are at all times consistently inconsistent with themselves, and with human nature.

Language has been framed for expressing things that *are*, or things that may be intelligibly conceived of. You will therefore find an extreme difficulty in attempting to give me, in any definite shape, your own idea of the apostles, *the facts duly taken into the account*, on the supposition that no miracles were wrought in attestation of their ministry. In this attempt you will never succeed, to your own satisfaction.

I will not tell you that your supposition as to the apostolic character is 'uncharitable,' or that it is 'unwarrantable,' or 'ungenerous,' and the like; for I am content to tell you—what is simply the fact—That it is a jumble of incoherencies to which no semblance of moral, or of immoral unity can be given. I do not tell you that your conception is wrong and unfair;—for it

is no conception at all—it is a sheer absurdity! I will return to this subject at any time if only you will put before me, in a form which I can understand, your idea of the apostles—all the facts allowed for, on the hypothesis of DISBELIEF.

THE FORCE OF CONGRUITY, IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY AND ITS MIRACLES.

IT would next come in order to bring under consideration those Five Books of the New Testament which contain narratives of miracles, blended with ordinary history, and with discourses—showing, in detail, that, throughout these books, the supernatural and the historical are indissolubly commingled. This indissoluble connexion might soon be shown in the several instances; but I abstain from this path for two reasons; first, because the demolition of Rationalism by Strauss, and its abandonment generally, supersedes the necessity for showing that the evangelic miracles cannot be explained away in the manner that was attempted by the German writers of that school. But beside this reason, as I propose to bring before you this same supernatural element, considered in a different light, I wish to avoid the irksomeness of going over the same ground twice, although it would be for different purposes.

I must repeat what I have already said (p. 94) just so far as to remind you that those of our convictions upon which we are accustomed to act with the most unhesitating confidence, and to which we commend

ourselves without fear, when life itself, or estate, is at risk, are *not*, or they seldom are, of that kind which we obtain by processes of catenary deduction; or by a course of reasoning which, in a technical sense, is logical. It is not so. Man, such as we find him on the beaten road of real life, is no such syllogistic automaton as that he should bring propositions in threes to bear upon the business and conduct of every day. Pedants do this, and they break their heads in consequence. It is by the force of congruous evidence—it is by help of wind and tide together, that we launch upon the dangerous atlantic of life, and cross it in confidence, and reach our port in safety.

The vast difference, as to its bearing upon our principles of action, and our every-day habitudes, between formal catenary reasoning and THE FORCE OF CONGRUITY, is felt in the instance of the argument concerning Christianity more than perhaps in any other case that could be named. Let it be that, with favourable impressions on the side of Christianity, and with a sincere wish to confirm ourselves in our religious belief, we carefully read one or two of the best modern books on the 'Evidences.' We follow the reasoning, from page to page, and we yield our assent to it, feeling it to be entirely conclusive. To frame a reply to this chain of proofs, in any manner that should be satisfactory to ourselves, we know to be impossible. And yet a few days after closing the book, the upshot of the perusal of it has been to leave us—not in a state of logical indecision, but only of discomfort and depression, as to our convictions; and we almost wish we had not

attempted to convince ourselves in this argumentative manner.

We need not go far to find the reason of such a result. Those who read books on the 'Evidences' in the favourable mood which I am now supposing, perfectly know that, if Christianity be true, it is not an abstract speculation, but a practical concernment for every day, and that among the many claimants upon our attention, *this* one claim stands, or should stand, foremost. But now the reasoning of the book we have just read is out of harmony with the machinery of real life; for a man is not used to *act* at a prompting of this sort. The argument, although it be irrefragable, comes upon us cross-grained as to all our habitudes as deliberative and spontaneous beings. In fact—after several failures in the endeavour to feel and act as Christian men, on the ground of argument, among the things and persons of the real world—we return the book on the 'Evidences' to a high shelf—we forget it, except to lend it to a perplexed friend; and for ourselves, we resume our Christian consciousness: unconsciously, but really, we go back to the sphere of those undefined moral congruities which heretofore have sustained our belief; and then we abandon *proofs in line.*

Nevertheless, as often as we return to the subject as a matter of argument, we find ourselves in a position of disadvantage. At a point far removed from the eye, and at the end of a vista of logical evidences, we get our view of the miracles of the Evangelic history. For a length of time we have been fixing the eye upon the supernatural, as it appears when seen in this perspective;

just as one might gaze upon a sunrise, seen through the bare trunks and naked branches of a wintry forest. Yet this aspect of these objects is not merely remote and accidental; but it produces an impression which is substantially untrue.

Without any very difficult effort of the mind, I can imagine myself to occupy a position whence I should look upon the miracles of the Evangelic History in their immediate proximity to those things with which, actually, they did always stand connected. I should then see the SUPERNATURAL in its relationship to the INFINITE, which is its true relation. When I place myself in this position, I at once discern the reason of that which otherwise is unaccountable—I mean the fact already noticed, that the apostolic men, though they declare themselves to be conversant with miracles, yet so seldom, and with such brevity, mention them. From this position, moreover, that perfect simplicity, and that calmness which has been so often remarked as the characteristic of the Gospels, when miracles are narrated, appears only natural and proper.

There are three mental conditions, easily distinguishable from each other, in which I can imagine an indubitable miracle to be witnessed. The *first* is that of what we may call—mediæval credulity—or an incurious, unreasoning, inconsequential passiveness, to which all things, natural and supernatural, come alike, and pass away without leaving any strong impression. The *second* state is that of our modern, dry, cold, sophisticated, scientific temper;—scientific more than it is philosophical. Witnessed in this mood, a miracle would astound

us—it would just curdle the brain, and produce little or no effect upon the moral nature.

But I can form an idea of a mental condition as much unlike the first of these two states as the second. I can imagine myself to have come into a discernment of those unchanging realities of the spiritual and moral system which *indeed* affect my welfare, present and future; so that the witnessing of a miracle would produce a feeling entirely congruous with such perceptions; and would neither astound nor agitate the mind. I can imagine myself to have so profound a sense of primary moral truths as that miracles would be confluent with the deep movements of the soul, and would produce no surge. I can imagine myself to have such a prospect of the plains of immortality—a prospect *moral*, not fanciful, not sensuous, as that the spectacle of the raising of the dead should instantly assort itself with my feelings. So to see 'death swallowed up in victory,' would excite no amazement. I read this very quietness in the apostolic Epistles; and it sheds the steady brightness of the morning upon Paul's discourse concerning the resurrection. This great fact concerning the destiny of man, which he there expounds, I also hold to be a truth, undoubted. But if, beside thus believing it with my modern logical persuasion—if instead of this belief, I had Paul's sight and consciousness of it, then, like him, I could speak of miracles briefly, firmly, and without a note of wonder.

The miracles of the evangelic history come to us with the force of CONGRUITY, just so far as we can bring ourselves morally within the splendour of those eternal verities which are of the substance of the Gospel.

While we stand remote from that illuminated field, they are to us only a galling perplexity; for we can neither rid ourselves of the evidence that attests them, nor are we prepared to yield ourselves to it. At this moment the Christian argument is nothing else than an intolerable torment to hundreds of cultivated minds around us.

In the crowd of those who witnessed the miracles of Christ, there were some who mocked; there were some who gnashed their teeth; there were many who marvelled and applauded, and soon forgot what they had seen. But there were some into whose minds the *doctrine*—the moral purport—the spiritual reality of his discourses had so entered, that, beside being conscious of the fitness of which already I have spoken, they felt, with overwhelming force, a Congruity of another kind; I mean that of these miracles with the majestic bearing and style of HIM who wrought them; for he did these 'mighty works' with the spontaneous ease of one in whom this power, and much more than this, was inherent.

From what sources have I gathered my idea of the personal aspect and demeanour of Christ? You will say from the groundless traditions of Italian art—from our modern religious poetry—from the pulpit, and so forth. It may be so in part; but the main rudiments of this idea have come to me—I am sure of this—from a year-to-year reading of the Gospels—commentaries, translations, and all modern accompaniments, out of view. This vivid conception of the Person is the genuine product of the Evangelic narratives, to which I have added

nothing by imaginative effort. It is not that the writers have described to me this PERSON, or that they have given me a leading hint, here and there, to put me on the right tack. An image has concreted itself in my mind, whether I would or not. So far as I have laboured with it at all, it has been for the purpose of reducing it to its very simplest expression—removing from it the pictorial—the poetic—the dramatic—the meditative decorations, and bringing it to consist with the most rigid conception of the plain historic reality, as to the country—the age—the race—the costume.

This idea of the personal aspect and demeanour—the individual manner and style of Christ, I find to be congruous with the narratives of his 'mighty works,' ON ONE SUPPOSITION ONLY; on any other supposition the incongruity is irresistibly revolting. I possess no such power over the intellect, or the moral intuitions, or the ideal faculty, as would be requisite for bringing any such repellant conceptions into combination. You will say that this IDEAL is *mine*, not *yours*; that you have no such conception; and therefore that you feel no such difficulty. But now, indulge me while I give you credit for a remainder of those sensibilities which perhaps you would disown, but which sophistry has not indurated.

You will not tell me that a consciousness is unreal, merely because I fail in my endeavours to give it intelligible expression, or indeed to put it into words at all. Do not the uncultured minds around us possess a genuine consciousness, as to moral principles, in behalf of which —either to explain, or to defend them, they would not have a word to say? Or take an instance such as this.

—I have a consciousness of the vast difference between the Greek sculpture of the purest times, and the Roman style of the imperial times, which consciousness is to me as much a matter of certainty as is any other thing whatever that has become an inseparable part of my existence. The difference between the one style of chipping marble into the human form and the other, is so clear in my view, that, to confound the two, or to mistake the one for the other, is impossible; and yet I should shrink from the attempt to set this same perception forth in sentences and paragraphs: I can do no such thing. Meantime you might as well tell me that honey and molasses have the same flavour, as try to convince me that this discriminative feeling is a mere illusion, or that it is a vulgar prejudice belonging to my artistic orthodoxy.

The sense of congruity which I have now in view, stands related to that moral regeneration which has placed our modern civilization so far in advance of the ancient civilization. To the ancient civilization—that, to wit, of the Athenian age, there belonged a purity of TASTE, which we, of this time, must be content to admire, and very poorly to imitate. But then in our modern literature, and in our poetry especially—in our fine arts—sculpture, painting, and music, there is a deep soul-life of which the entire circle of ancient art and literature barely offers the faintest indications. To the modern mind there has come to belong an awful capacity of feeling, and a liability to intensities, both of suffering and of enjoyment (the one as well as the other intellectual, not sensuous) of which the bright, gay, *surface-*

loving mind of antiquity seems to have known little or nothing. Then along with this power of feeling, striking into the roots of the soul as it does, there are perceptions and instinctive judgments, of which it must be said that they are altogether modern developments of humanity; they are *true* elements of our nature; but they have newly been brought from the subsoil.

It is to the slow working of Christianity upon human nature that I attribute nearly the whole of this deeper vitality of the modern mind:—You think otherwise; but yet our difference as to the cause cannot affect our acknowledgment of the fact. If you should attempt to deny the *fact*, I must think of you not merely as anti-Christian, but as downright pagan.

Often and truly it has been said that the writers of the Gospels were men wholly incapable of imagining, or of putting together, a consistent fiction of any kind. But to say this is to say little in relation to the instance which I have now in view; for the accordance which comes upon my modern consciousness with so irresistible a force is of a sort to which the ancient world entire, cultured and uncultured—Greek, Roman, or Jewish, was not alive. Not only were there then no *writers* skilful enough, designedly, to bring together those elements of harmony; but even if there had been such writers, there were then no *readers* to whose senses any such harmony would have been cognizable.

It is allowed that the miracles of the Gospels are, for the most part, narrated in the fewest words, and in the most artless manner. Then abreast of these narratives, and intermingled with them, come the instances of

Christ's behaviour, in various positions, and of His utterances of those ethical principles which are peculiarly Christian. Now between these elements which are here found in juxtaposition, there presents itself a congruity which the modern mind vividly perceives, but of which the ancient mind would scarcely have been conscious at all. The ancient mind formed a conception of the Goëtes, and of the Thaumaturge, in which conception the sombre, inscrutable element was the leading principle. The man so conceived of, and of whom types enough, in all their varieties, might be seen in Egypt—that seat of jugglery, was the murky or the epileptic supernaturalist. Antiquity had not conceived of a worker of miracles in whose course of life and behaviour the working of miracles showed itself as a *secondary* and incidental element, and in whose character Love was of the substance, while the supernatural faculty was the adjunct only.

Whencesoever the materials of the Gospels may have come—and it is the legitimate office of criticism to inquire whence—this is certain, that they do convey an Idea of a PERSON, possessing, in an extraordinary degree, the charm of UNITY, or singleness of intention. This idea may be variously expressed: it includes consistency of ultimate purpose, and the coherence of all principles of action; it includes oneness of aim, from the commencement to the close of a course of life: it supposes uniformity of temper, and a sameness of the impression that is produced by the Person upon other minds. Then this idea excludes all those inconsequential departures from the main purpose of a man's life, which, when

we witness them, prompt the exclamation—How unaccountable, and how inconsistent a being is man, at the best!

If I wanted proof that this symmetry, moral and intellectual, does really belong to that idea of the person which the Gospels embody and convey, I should find it in the fact that, amid all the dogmatic distractions that have troubled Christendom, during eighteen centuries, there has prevailed, in all times, and among all Christianized nations, a wonderful uniformity as to the idea that has floated before all minds of the PERSONAL CHRIST. Wherever the four Gospels are popularly read, this same conception forms itself and prevails. Infancy spontaneously acquires it: manhood does not revise or reject it:—age holds it to the last. It is not in consequence of the poverty of the elements it embraces, or of any vagueness in the mode of conveyance, that this idea is so perfectly symmetrical.

Now observe that this symmetry, or harmony of the elements, constituting the idea of Christ as a person, embraces the miraculous portions of the evangelic narrative, not less than the ordinary; and indeed, if there are any parts of this narrative which a reader of correct taste would single out as the most resplendent instances of moral fitness and unity, they are precisely those that narrate miracles with the most of detail.

It is affirmed by those who reject everything that presents itself as miracle in the Gospels, that these four compilations have become what they now are by the accumulation of heterogeneous fragments, vague traditions, exaggerated early beliefs, and myths. The Four

Gospels, it is said, are constituted of a few morsels of genuine history, mingled with the illusions of the popular mind;—that mind being then in a state like the 'troubled ocean, casting up mire and dirt;' and then it must be believed that, out of a random confluence, such as this, there has come a PERSONAL CONCEPTION which is not merely morally beautiful, in the highest degree, but which, beyond all comparison, is symmetrical, and is exempt from discordant adjuncts. Are the chances as a million to one, or in what other proportion are they, that a conglomerate, mingling the true and the false (for *you* must except against *all* the miracles as false) should present an instance of congruity to which no equal can be found?

All the world, that is to say—readers of the Gospels, ten thousand to one, are conscious of this congruity, and they discern this moral beauty. You say you see little or nothing of the sort; on the contrary, in the course of a strict criticism of these writings you have detected—how many is it?—ninety-nine, or a hundred and one, discrepancies (these Gospel contradictions constituting, just now, the stock entire of Disbelief); or you admit a something of harmony in the merely historic 'Jesus of Nazareth;' but you spurn the miraculous portion of the narrative. Yet you cannot effect this separation; for the harmony is not divisible. The *supernatural* cleaves to the *individual*; and the two elements constitute together the one person.

Among these miracles there are no portents—such as are related by classic writers; nor are there any exhibitions of things monstrous;—there are no contrarieties

to the order of nature; there is nothing prodigious, there is nothing grotesque. Nor among them are there any of that kind that might be called THEATRIC. There are no displays of supernatural power, made in the presence of thousands of the people, summoned to witness them. Although claiming to be sent of God into the world, with a sovereign authority, Christ did not, as Elijah had done, convene the people, and then challenge his enemies to dispute with him his mission by help of counter-attestations.

Taken singly, and when regarded in relation to the circumstance out of which each of them arose, the evangelic miracles were as spontaneous, and, in *this sense*, they were as natural, as would be the acts of any one of ourselves who, while walking up and down in this world of suffering, should suddenly become conscious of a power to give effect to the promptings and yearnings of pity. When I tread the floor of an hospital—what is it that I would do if I could? It is precisely that which the Saviour of men did at the impulse of the very same sympathies, as often as the 'sick, and the maimed, and the blind' were brought in crowds, and laid at His feet—'He healed them all.'

What we have before us in the Gospels is not the Thaumaturge, going about to astound the multitude; but it is the MAN, whose human affections are here in alliance with OMNIPOTENCE. That hand uplifted, while the lips utter an axiom of virtue, symbolizes at once perfect intelligence, absolute goodness, and irresistible power. If I can imagine myself to stand in that presence, at such a time, I should have felt that the fixed-

ness of the course of nature is only an arbitrary and temporary constitution; and that it must be less constant than are those energies of love which are eternal. In the presence of Him whose volitions flow out into act, without an interval, the difference between the natural and the supernatural—if it has not already vanished, seems to tremble upon the balance; for nothing can be more natural than that omnipotent compassion should have its way. What is this material universe, in its vastness, and its variety, what but the product, every moment, of the perpetual WILL of the Creator? If we believed ourselves to stand near to HIM in whom the perfections of the Infinite Being dwelt bodily, a sovereign volition of one kind would not be accounted more difficult, or strange, than volitions of another kind.

Considerations of this sort are thrown out as they suggest themselves, and they may be admitted or rejected. What I insist upon may be condensed in these four allegations.—

i.—A distinct INDIVIDUALITY, in the historic sense of the word, presents itself, in the perusal of the Four Gospels: all the world feels this, and has felt it in every age.

ii.—By the consent of mankind, or the involuntary suffrage of Christianized nations, ancient and modern, a perfect individual idea, combining the intellectual and moral qualities of ONE who is wise, and good, and who is possessed of superhuman power and authority, is embodied in the Four Gospels.

iii.—This harmony, or, as we call it, this beauty of character, in which there is no distortion, and with which nothing is mingled that is incoherent, is spread over the entire surface of the evangelic narratives, embracing the supernatural incidents of the life of Christ, not less than the natural. In these narratives no seams, or joints, can be discerned, showing where the spurious portion has been spliced on to the genuine; but—

iv.—If we reject Christianity, as true in its own sense, that is to say, as attested by miracles, then we must solve the problem before us by means of one of two suppositions, or of some other, not essentially differing from the one or the other, each of which, as it comes in turn to be considered, is found to be inadmissible, and insufferable. These suppositions are either—That no historic reality whatever has formed the substratum of the Gospel history: in this case a perfect individuality has sprung out of a congeries of illusions; or—The merely natural portions of the evangelic history being true, the supernatural portions have been imagined, contrived, and fitted to their places, with so profound a skill as to defy all power of criticism to trace the joinings.

Let Christianity solve its own problem in its own way, and then we stand clear of endless perplexities—having before us, in perfect symmetry—the CHRIST OF GOD—the Saviour of the world.

Let Christianity solve its own problem, in its own way, and then, not only does this perfect congruity ensue, connecting the PERSONAL CHARACTER of Christ with his miraculous acts; but a congruity connecting also these miracles with the Great Scheme of which they are the adjuncts.

At intervals of frequent recurrence during the last two hundred years, Christian writers have carried on an argument, the conditions of which have compelled them to regard the miracles recorded in the Gospels under the one aspect of their *present availableness*, for the polemical purpose of establishing the truth of Christianity, as a revelation from Heaven. Thus to appeal to these supernatural attestations is, no doubt, a legitimate mode of defence against infidelity; and yet it is not while we are placing ourselves in this accidental position, or when we are driven in upon it by sophistry, that we shall ourselves be conscious of the real meaning of those same events as related to the SCHEME OF RELIGION which they serve to attest. This scheme, so far as it is unfolded in the Scriptures, or so far as it may be thence gathered, inferentially, grasps the destinies of the human family from the first; and it so stretches itself out in prospect as to leave nothing connected with those destinies which it does not embrace and provide for.

Christianity must be looked at in its own light. So looked at, it is seen to fill all time, and to lay its hand upon the human species, comprehensively, and absolutely. No child of man is born beyond its domain;

none shall ever effect his escape into regions where its authority is not recognised.

If the Gospel be thus thought of in the way in which itself claims to be considered, it will follow that the ministry of Christ, as narrated by the Evangelists, must be quite misunderstood so long as it is regarded as a course of events bounded by the initial and the closing year of his life among men. Whether we number ourselves with believers, or with unbelievers, we shall continue to misinterpret the facts, or to be perplexed by them, while we keep the eye upon that narrow field of five-and-thirty years.

You will tell me I am about to assume the truth of Christianity in order that I may show it to be true. I admit that it is so, in great measure; and in the nature of things it must be so. So long as your mood of mind is this—that you will grant nothing which it is possible for you to deny, you will catch only a glimpse of things disadvantageously presented to the eye. But if you allow me to exhibit the same objects in their true position, and in their natural proportions, you will yourself see them to be real. After this you will not ask me to follow you from point to point in so rigid a manner.

If I undertook to teach you the modern astronomy, and you would at once grant that my interpretation of the visible heavens is the true one, I should be able to convince you that it is so in much less time, and by a far less painful process, than as if you make it a point of honour to dispute every inch of ground.

Up to this time I am not aware that I have assumed anything—or anything material—which a well-informed and ingenuous opponent can show to be disputable. But it is not while following evidences, step by step, that the harmony of truth can be exhibited. In what may follow I propose to choose my ground with more freedom—to assume the truth of that which I know to be true, and to employ myself in the more hopeful labour of setting forth those great consistencies among the principles and the facts of Christianity in regarding which its truth commands an assent which we yield cordially.

MODERN ATHEISM IS IMPIETY, CHRISTIANISED.

In several places, in these pages, and as occasion arose, I have remanded the question of the Inspiration of the Scriptures, as not involved in the course of argument which I am now pursuing. It is manifest that these two subjects—The HISTORIC REALITY of Christianity—claiming to be a Religion given by God to man, and the INSPIRATION of the canonical books, are subjects *separable* in a logical sense. And not only are they separable, so as that they may be considered and discussed irrespectively the one of the other, but they are, in my opinion, best kept apart—especially so when we have to do with those who profess Disbelief; for recent disbelief rests itself almost entirely upon allegations that take their force from a mistaken apprehension of what we mean by Inspiration.

But if these two questions are separable, and if they should be kept separate, then it is manifest that the one with which I have concerned myself in these pages must have the precedence of the one which I remand. It must be a very illogical course to infer the historic truth of the Gospel from the alleged inspiration of the books which bring it to our knowledge. To say—and

to say it to an opponent—Christianity is true because the Gospels and Epistles are inspired books, is indeed to make a very unscrupulous use of the petitio principii.

This logical sequence of the one subject as related to the other is quite obvious; and scarcely less so is the necessity, at this present time, of establishing our position immovably, as Christians, upon the ground of a belief that is purely historic. That this may be done I have a perfect confidence. When it has been done, such inferences will be seen inevitably to follow as must leave nothing worth the contending for on the side of Disbelief.

If Christianity be true—historically—its miracles included—and if indeed 'Christ rose from the dead according to the Scriptures,' then the writings which bring facts such as these to our knowledge will take a place of *authority* in our mind and conscience which, practically, and as to their influence in determining our faith and our conduct, must be very nearly the same whatever may be the theory or the opinion we adopt (among the many that have been advanced) concerning Inspiration.

That these theories or these opinions, on a subject so arduous, and so important, are all nearly on a level as to their intrinsic merits, I am far from professing to think; but I think that among those who have already yielded to the force of the evidence which proves Christianity to be true, the grounds of difference will be continually becoming more narrow, until a substantial agreement shall have taken place, and thus controversy on the subject will die away.

If now I may suppose myself to have to do with an ingenuous opponent, I would ask such a one to forego the transient advantage which he may seize while he fights the doctrine of Inspiration. Let him deny himself any such momentary triumph, and manfully encounter the *historic argument*—the alleged inspiration of the books not considered. I might well ask *such* an opponent to yield this point, simply because it is reasonable so to do; but further, I will ask it because he who makes the request—which is in itself reasonable—does so in a mood which entitles him to be listened to.

While earnestly wishing that the reader of these pages may forget the *Writer*, and think only of the *argument*, I have persuaded myself that two inferences concerning him would, in a manner, whisper themselves in the ear of an intelligent reader. The first of these inferences is this—That the writer is no timid waverer between belief and disbelief—looking about for expedients whereby to effect a compromise of the controversy now on foot. The second inference is this—That, how decisive soever may be his own convictions as a Christian, he harbours no ill feeling toward those to whom he opposes himself; and that, as well on the ground of temperament, as of principle, he is as exempt as most men from religious arrogance, and as little addicted to dogmatism.

Although it is certain that I could not regard with cordial feelings those who are employing conspicuous talents in the work of loosening the hold which salutary truths have upon the minds of men; nevertheless the risings of resentment will have been checked if one has

learned to think of such persons as the agents in a movement which is written in the book of fate, and the beneficial issue of which if not immediate, is sure to come.

The recent* outburst of antagonism toward Christianity may be contemplated by Christian men from opposite points of view; as for example; I might, with reason, as many Christian men do, look at this 'Infidelity' and this 'Impiety' with feelings of indignation, as a wanton outrage upon society; and so I might be wrought up to a pitch of zeal, impelling me to make proclamation, 'Who is on the Lord's side?—who?' and then to vent my feelings in terms that disguise curses. There might even be reason in such a mood of mind; albeit it does not suit my individual temperament.

But these same facts may be looked at as they are seen from another position. It is implied in the very theorem of Christianity, if it be a body of truth, sent down to work its way in a world out of order, and if it is to offer no solution of the dark problems of such a world, that, from time to time, it should evolve contrary schemes of belief, which draw their life and meaning, and their intensity, *from out of itself*. Heaven's own truth will not fail, at epochs, to bring the insoluble problems of this present world to press with intolerable weight upon the minds of men—and it is often the choicest minds that come under the pressure. Those principles of mundane regeneration which Christianity has put in movement, and which it keeps in movement

* Written in 1852.

by new impulses from age to age, often take effect upon single minds, and upon communities, in a convulsive manner, and with almost a mortal violence. The Gospel scheme might be shown to carry, in its depths, the yeast of these periodic fermentations. Allow me here a jumble of figures.—If this system were not immortal, it must long ago have been devoured by its own progeny. A false system either could not concoct such perilous energies; or even if it could, would not have survived the first outburst of them.

Christianity, until it shall have reached its next stage —that of acknowledged supremacy in relation to human affairs—cannot be imagined to live in the world on any possible condition than that of passing through recurrent seasons of conflict with adverse principles, which, though the germs of them are universally diffused, are not quickened except when they come into collision with eternal truth. It is thus that the DISBELIEF of these last times, so far as it is a scheme of doctrine, may be shown to be a birth of Christian doctrine. The Atheism of the present time partly, and the Theism entirely, is a heresy which is full of Christian sap. By calling it *Christian*, I mean that it has no meaning at all except that which it has wrung from the elements of Christian belief, brought into collision one with another. Atheism, in these days, is not, as of old, a metaphysic abstraction, or an icy, dry paradox; but it is a living creature, speaking with a loud voice, and showing a ruddy cheek, because it has drawn life-blood from that which can spare much, and yet live. If the Gospel—the destruction of which is eagerly desired by

some among us, were actually to breathe its last, not one of those schemes of doctrine which are now offered to us in its stead would thenceforward draw another breath. Universal nonbelief, which is the death of the human soul toward God and immortality, must instantly ensue.

But there is little fear of the coming on of any such hour of darkness. So long as Impiety has Christian blood in its veins, it will henceforward, as now, start up to say its say, and to trouble our love of ease. It will do so because Christianity itself, which is now the only source of moral life in the world, and is immortal, will continue, not only, as heretofore, to 'satisfy her poor with bread,' but to scatter broken meat to her enemies. We shall continue, therefore, both to believe, and to contend with Disbelief; but we shall not fall into Nonbelief.

This course of things is not merely inevitable, but it is highly useful; it is indispensable if not to the conservation of the Gospel, yet to the restoration of its forces from time to time. As to the good Christian people of this time, or of any other, we could not be willing to leave Christianity in their hands, undisturbed and irresponsible—far from it. The work that is needed to be done, from time to time, is of a sort which perfunctory good intentions will never attempt, and which conventional wisdom knows not how to set about. Let me here speak with reverence:—God will perform this work, and will call to it those who, as to their calling, will perhaps work at it in the dark.

In proportion as there comes upon us a deeper sense

of the awful reality of the Christian scheme, and of its bearing upon the welfare of the human family, now and hereafter, shall we feel distrustful of the easy, overweening, and egotistic Christianism of the mass of Christian people. At the impulse of this uneasiness, one may be fain to cry out—looking across the road to the ranks of 'Infidels and Atheists'—'Friends! come over and help us;—set the house on fire, and then we shall shake off our illusions, and do our duty.'

At any time an outburst of Infidelity compels intelligent Christian men to look anew to the ground on which they stand, and to sift the 'Evidences,' and thus to regain logical possession of their religious persuasion. This is well; and so is an after consequence of such a fermentation—namely, the throwing off from the Christian body sundry superstitions and superannuations, which the 'Enemy' in the heat of action has snatched hold of, and which no one thenceforward will attempt to restore to their places: these relics are left to strew the field of battle.

But there is a result which is far more important than either of these, consequent upon a time of out-spoken impiety, and of which impiety Christianity, being, as it is, the only TRUTH now extant among men, is necessarily the object. This momentous interaction, partly logical, partly moral and spiritual, is of this kind:—

In the course of the recent argumentation a marked approximation has been made, on both sides, toward that point whereat the two beliefs—the Christian and the Antichristian—must come to an issue. We are drawing on toward that ground—a very limited space,

which all see to be the area whereupon one question only shall remain to be determined, in this way, or in that. The religious controversy of the passing time is bearing us forward toward a single issue. The alternative now in front of us is this—CHRISTIANITY or ATHEISM. All lines of thought are tending toward this point: all well-informed men, whose habits of thought are unshackled, have long ago come to see this; or they are struggling to hold themselves off from it.

What we mean here by CHRISTIANITY is—the Gospel, in its plenitude and its amplitude, interpreting itself in its own way, and speaking among men in a tone of authority from which there is no appeal.

What we mean by ATHEISM I do not well know how otherwise to define than by saying that it is the proposition which stands last in logical order among those which the human reason can put into words, at all intelligibly, concerning the universe, or that compass of phenomena, external and internal, with which we have to do.

One feels that this alternative, and nothing short of it, is near in front of us, because, on the one side, those many ill-judged schemes for effecting a compromise with infidelity, which of late have been propounded by estimable Christian men, carry upon them the indications of their origin in a faultering belief—in mistaken discretion, and in confusedness of mind. We may be sure that no such devices as these can have power to check that mighty movement to which we are all of us committed, or that it can save us from the issue. On the other side—the side of Disbelief—the endeavours

that are making by Theists to float a raft a-head of Niagara, would be purely absurd, if the consequences were not fatal.

We have reached this, our present position, after leaving far in the rear the ribaldry of the Voltaire epoch. We have also now lately left behind us the elaborate whim of Strauss. Strauss, by acknowledgment, has failed in his endeavour to solve the historic problem of the origin of Christianity, on the assumption that it is false. The same thing, stated in other words, is this—That the historic argument, on the affirmative side, is found to be irresistible. This is the consequence which, by his failure, this able writer has helped us to come to.

If there be any means of holding off from the alternative above stated, it must be sought for among those schemes of antichristian Theism which recommend themselves by an exterior of refined spiritualism, but which, fair as they may seem on the sentimental side, will not bear to be looked into on the logical side. Such schemes will not avail for the purpose intended by their framers, because, as may easily be shown, recent advancements in modes of thinking have made it impossible to fence them off from the border doctrine—Pantheism; nor are much pains needed to prove that the boundary between pantheism and atheism is like the margin of twilight between day and night in the tropics—it is an ambiguity that is passed in ten minutes. It is not that Natural Theology does not now, as ever, rest upon its own firm foundations; or that, in ascertaining these foundations, we are driven to the shift of reasoning

in a circle, alternately assuming our premises in Natural Theology, for establishing Christianity, and anon using Christianity in making good our Natural Theology: no such expedients as these are called for.

But the case, as touching us at the present moment, is this.—During a lapse of years which need not be precisely dated, as well the abstract as the concrete theistic argument has insensibly moved itself forward in advance of the position which awhile ago it occupied. The line of argument which was accepted as sufficient and conclusive in Paley's time, and which embraced so many accumulated evidences of power, intelligence, and benevolent intention, drawn from the material universe, and from organisms—vegetable and animal, around us, is indeed as valid now as heretofore, and it is unassailable. Yet it fails to meet the intellectual requirements of these times; for this argument does not furnish us with an entire Theology, and it scarcely opens at all the path towards a Theodicy; much less does it lay the foundation for a Worship, or give fixed support to an Ethical Doctrine. And it fails to reveal a Future Life.

On all sides, therefore, we now feel and know—and it is strange that our predecessors were so little conscious of the fact—that, for achieving these last-named purposes (and unless they are achieved the argument is frustrate) we must go much deeper, and must look wider and further: our evidences, to be conclusive against the recent Atheism, must embrace the world of Mind, as well as the world of Matter; and we must bring our argument to bear upon those realities of the moral world of which the reasoners of past times seem

to have had but a glimmering consciousness. Our Natural Theology must take its hold upon our convictions, and come home to the instincts of the *real life*, that is to say—the life of the soul.

Now when we have done this—driven as we are to do it by the current of thought at this time—and when in the process of doing it we have recognised as *true*, and have reinstated as *authentic*, the circle of our emotional and moral instincts, sympathies, and aspirations—when we have assigned a place to our irradicable hopes, and also to our irradicable misgivings and alarms, and have thus constructed for ourselves a Natural Theology worth the labouring for;—when, in a word, we have taken up anew a Theology, a Theopathy, a Theodicy, a Morality—when we find our feet resting upon a basis of hope, as men immortal, and also that we are standing within range of terrors, as men guilty; when we find that there has reared itself around us an edifice within which men may be invited to pay homage to the Creator, Ruler, and Father, we then feel that any longer to repel Atheism, *and at the same time* to discard Christianity, is impossible. We have brought ourselves so near touching upon the awful alternative above mentioned, that to hold off from it, demands an effort like that of one who is clinging by the hands to the pediment of a lofty building.

Up to a certain point Natural Theology runs parallel with Christianity. Removing the forms of the argument, and thinking of its substance, or substituting concrete for abstract terms, it is not easy to distinguish the one body of belief from the other. But when we

have trod the Theistic ground thus far, Christianity is ready to collapse upon us, and to challenge us to surrender. And this challenge gets a deeper meaning at each step of our progress.

The Deists of the time gone by seem to have been little conscious of speculative difficulties which we of this time are groaning under. It is amazing to see in how dry, cold, and mechanic a style the writers of the past era—Christian as well as antichristian, deal with those painful subjects which touch the modern mind to the quick, and which well-nigh drive sensitive spirits to despair. A trim, academic, syllogistic, and rotund paragraph, indicating no genuine sympathy with human suffering, no anguish of soul, no conflict, not even a man-like feeling toward our fellow men, did well enough for the finish-off of an argument attempted for 'justifying the ways of God toward man.' The 'tenth head of discourse' in a sermon would afford space wherein to propound and to dissipate all reasonable doubts on questions of that order!

But the times have changed. A new and better feeling has come, not upon the few only, but upon very many, if not the mass of minds. It is a *better* feeling (whatever it may lead to) in so far as *feeling* is better than apathy; and as there might be a question whether it would not be better for a man to give himself up to despair, than that he should live on in indifference to facts which would make him wish himself out of the world, if he were but conscious of them.

At this moment we may be quite sure that no scheme of religious belief will be able to hold its footing abroad

in the world, or beyond the walls of cloisters, which does not, in some intelligible and coherent manner, make provision for securing our peace of mind in regard to the present lot, and to the prospects of the human family.

It is on this arduous ground that the fate of the recent Theisms, one and all of them, is sealed. They will have their day, and then become as the chaff of the threshing-floor. Atheism offers its services by showing us how we may cease to feel, or to trouble ourselves concerning anything that does not touch our individual animal welfare at the passing moment. But it is few that can take to themselves this sort of comfort—brutish as it is.

Our Theistic friends cannot do it; and, while turning their backs upon the Gospel, they are struggling at desperate odds to keep at bay the last enemy in the direction toward which they are looking. They are asking—'Why may not we, as did our illustrious predecessors, stand our ground, and enjoy our philosophic religion, while we spurn your obsolete Christianity?' We answer—You cannot do it, because we and you, and all of us, have moved on to new ground. You see that the Theologians of this time do not utter, nor can they bring their lips to frame, those heartless inferences concerning the lot of man in this world and the next, which passed glibly over the tongues of their predecessors. This fact might give you a significant notice that the time is gone when the icy philosophy of a profligate age could be re-edited. The same impossibility which presses upon Christian theologians at this time, must take

effect in another manner upon yourselves, and must forbid your wrapping yourselves in the fool's coat that fitted the broad shoulders of your grandsires.

The Theists of this time might perhaps hold their ground if their near neighbours, the Atheists, who laugh at them, would let them alone; but they will not let them alone. *They* have found in their abyss a sort of comfort and a present ease, which the Theist will never enjoy while he struggles to keep his head above water, and while he continues to look up to the sky.

Abstract questions are necessarily the same in substance in every age; and any attempted solution of the difficulties that attach to such questions can vary but little, except as to the order of the thoughts, and the tone and the style of the language employed by individual writers. Inasmuch therefore as those perplexities with which the best minds, in all times, have struggled—to little or no purpose, must continue to press upon every scheme of Philosophic Theism, those who, at this moment, are propounding such schemes ought not to imagine that they shall be more successful than their predecessors. But unless they are so—unless, in a very signal manner, they are more successful, then it is certain that the human mind is moving toward a ground where these ancient difficulties will gain a tenfold force. This should be well understood. I advert to it here for the purpose of showing with what feeling I regard those who, as antichristian men, I must speak of as adversaries, but who are not yet Atheists.

In regard to the time that may be near at hand, and as a preparation for that one last convulsion which the

human mind must pass through, in making its choice between Christianity and Atheism, it is not merely desirable, but it is indispensable to the good issue of the conflict, that Antichristian Theism should *first* have exhausted all its resources—should have shot its best arrow, should have refined itself to the utmost, should have culminated in its own heavens—and, especially, that it should have given utterance, in opposition to Christianity, to the most extreme doctrine which may any way be made to consist with its holding a position at all against Atheism.

It may be thought that this preliminary work has already been accomplished; but I can imagine something better to come than what has hitherto been put forth by our hostile friends—the anti-christian anti-atheists. As yet, what we have had before us has borne the manifest indication of being the product either of minds unstable, impulsive, and perturbed, and ill content with their own holdings (which they cannot hold to) or of such as are flippant, self-seeking, ambitious, and coldly vain—minds that to win a clap, would not scruple to sink a world. I can hardly imagine that Antichristian Theism has completed its destined work while it is represented by writers who show no such seriousness or honesty of purpose as would lead them fairly to meet the problem as to the origin of Christianity, and to scorn sophisms which can serve a turn only among the least informed and the most unthinking readers.

Especially we want to see what can be done in making good a scheme of anti-christian anti-atheism, by men

who have that modesty and self-respect which inspires respect for an opponent. On this ground the entire class of modern infidel writers is very much at fault. Christianity, keeping its hold, as it does, of the convictions of men who are as highly cultured as any others, and who are as robust in mind as any, and as fearlessly honest as any, it is an ill symptom when writers on that side constantly affect ignorance of any such fact, and are showing off their condescension toward the obtuse superstitions that are prevalent in these 'dark ages.'

I am apt to think that this pitiful affectation must nearly have worn itself out by this time, and that men who will be ashamed of it are yet to come forward on the same side—if indeed anything further remains to be advanced on that side.

Meantime I harbour no animosity toward the writers, such as they are, with whom a Christian writer has to do. I, for myself, am heartily glad that I am not doing their work—although, alas! it must be done by somebody. Toward some who manifestly have known, as I have known, the pains of saddened meditation, my feelings are those of profound sympathy. As to the flippant and the ambitious, it is easy to forget them. As to one or two who, in a fit of moral hallucination, have uttered revolting blasphemies, I leave them in the hands of HIM whom they revile, and who once carried charitable hope to its utmost boundary when He said, 'They know not what they do.'

THE THREE PURPOSES OF CHRIST'S MISSION, AS ATTESTED BY MIRACLES. ITS FIRST INTENTION.

If it be sincere men that are to be addressed, then it may be demanded of them that the Gospel should be listened to on the supposition that it is true: and then, let it be proved to be false, if that can be done. In appending this last condition, I must not be so misunderstood as if I could imagine this to be possible. It is not possible so long as we respect the laws of evidence, and the principles of human nature. But the Christian argument must be allowed to follow the course which is pursued in the exposition and demonstration of every other system of proof in which premises are assumed, conclusions arrived at, difficulties cleared up, and counter-suppositions shown to be untenable.

Whoever charges himself with the task of conveying to the minds of others a system — of whatever kind — must be understood to have reached his ground in some such manner as this: that is to say—he professes to understand the subject of which he is to treat; and those to whom he speaks must believe that he does understand

it, and that he is familiar with all parts of it, including its most difficult problems. His hearers must listen to him on the belief that what he affirms to be true, he knows to be demonstrable; and they must believe too that he is prepared, at the last, to meet and remove all reasonable objections.

There is nothing in the circle of philosophy, or of criticism, or of history, or of physical science, that can be duly set forth and established, unless, virtually, as much as this is postulated on the one side, and is cheerfully allowed on the other. Dropping therefore a petitionary tone, and abstaining from those circumlocutions which spring from the consciousness of having to encounter a perpetual gainsaying and contradiction, I am to speak in the confidence that my position is good; and that it is impregnable.

So much as this being granted, then we are to consider what it is we are to look for in the documents of the Christian Religion.

Now from the discourses of Christ, and from the veiled meaning of several of his parables, we gather this inference—that his mission, as toward the human family, had, in his own view of it, Three Purposes, which are, to a great extent, irrespective of each other; and which, although they are not in fact disjoined, are yet susceptible of independent interpretation. The supernatural element of the Christian system—namely, that body of miracles which is recorded by the four Evangelists—has a meaning which is peculiar in relation to each of these three purposes, considered independently of the others; and in relation to each, and to the entire scheme of

which His ministry on earth was the visible act, the miracles wrought by him in the course of it are not the substance of that scheme; but, although inseparable from it, they are adjunctive, and incidental to it. The supernatural element, although adjunctive, holds its position, unchanged by the lapse of ages. If we have come to think of the miracles of the evangelic history—granting the entire truth of the record—as events which have long ago come to their end, and which are now receding from our view, and fading away in the haze of a remote antiquity—if we thus think, we misapprehend the purport of the Gospel, and lose sight of its perpetual vitality. This I shall endeavour to show.

The three purposes embraced in the Mission of Christ —sent of God to bring about the well-being of the human family, or to open a door of hope to all its tribes—are these three.—

FIRST we gather from Christ's incidental expressions, and from the purport of some of his parables, this—That he knew himself to have appeared in the world to effect, by means of principles which he originated, or which he authenticated, a SECULAR REFORMATION; that is to say, a purification, a rectification, and an ennobling of man's life, individually and socially, as related to this present course of things—even that life individual of which death is the termination, and that life social which matures itself in races—expires with them, and renews itself in other and remote regions.

CHRIST, the Reformer and Philanthropist, was to achieve this purpose just so far as in its nature it could be brought about, by means that are purely suasive; or,

as we say, by moral influences, apart from the auxiliary concomitance of visible and political institutions, or of secular power, or the setting up of a material empire.

As to the SECOND of the purposes above named, a far more explicit reference is made to it by himself than to either the first or the third. In truth it so stands out in his discourses, and it so presents itself in his apologues, as might lead us to suppose that it was the ruling purpose of his life, and the reason of his sufferings and death, and that which, when he had made it sure by his resurrection, became the complement of joy in the forethought of which he had endured the cross and despised its ignominy. This—the second and the prominent purpose of Christ's mission, was—the rescue of a gathering—call it, if you will, an election—from out of the million millions of the human family, and the conferring upon these—whom he calls 'his own'—the life divine, the life immortal—even a new and imperishable existence, of which his own human immortality was to be at once the type and the pledge.

On this ground I am not writing as a theologian, or as a disputant on one side of an antiquated controversy. I know nothing about systems of divinity, nothing about confessions of faith, nothing about articles of religion.

What I have to do with, and the only things that come within my field of vision, are these:—on the one hand, Christ's own professions—distinct and unambiguous as they are; and on the other hand, that matter of fact which has conspicuously attached to, and has characterized, the course of events in all ages and

countries when and where the Gospel has, in any measure, developed its energies.

The accomplishment of this second purpose, as well as of the first, was to involve such means only as are purely suasive—moral and spiritual, that is to say as distinguished from such as are visible, political, and mundane. But then, more than this, it implies the presence of a spiritual energy, going beyond the suasive force of moral principles, or of audible teaching, and which takes effect in each instance in a manner that is inscrutable, that is infallible, and that is analogous to those acts of the Creative will which at the first filled the universe with life, and which is now and always doing the same.

As to the THIRD of those purposes which we assume to have been included in the mission of Christ, inasmuch as it is more occult than the first, and far more so than the second, and as it touches only in an indirect manner the circle of human duties and sentiments, so is it very sparingly alluded to in his discourses, and if anywhere it is affirmed as a doctrine, the conveyance is made in symbolic terms.

Brevity and allusiveness, in this instance, is what we should look for, as proper in one who is in truth what he professes himself to be. The Enthusiast or the pretender would either have made no *such* challenge; or if he had made it, he would have blazoned it in hyperbolic style.

Gathering up from Christ's incidental utterances, and from his apologues, the less obvious import of certain passages, we infer that he professes himself to

have entered upon the stage of the world, on the part of its Rightful Lord, the Almighty, to deliver the human family from under the hand of a Usurper—to restore truth and order—to overthrow a tyranny, and to bind and expel the Tyrant; and having done so—to 'lead captivity captive.'

The accomplishment of this THIRD purpose of the advent supposes on the part of the Deliverer an absolute lordship over all human spirits (willing and unwilling) a control of all destinies—present and future—to wit—the weal and the woe of the Living and of the Dead—for Christ is the Sovereign and the Judge: He is King of Hades, and He is Master also of every spiritual race, as well the loyal as the rebellious.

The accomplishment of this ulterior purpose of Christ's mission, and the achievement of this conquest, is to be brought about in such a manner—so we infer—and by such means *only*, as shall at once demonstrate, and shall signalize, in the view of all, the INTRINSIC FORCE of Goodness, Truth, Rectitude, when, on even ground, these immortal energies are matched against wickedness, with its falsities, its subterfuges, its blundering intelligence—its sophisms—and its own malignant devices. This supremacy of Good in its conflict with Evil is to be exhibited under conditions that shall be as favourable as may be to the party that is in the end to be discomfited.

In thus sketching the outline of the argument just now in hand, I profess it to be my intention to show that the series of miracles recorded by the Evangelists,

consummated as they were by the miracle of Christ's resurrection, occupy a place of perpetual efficacy in relation, *separately*, to each of the three abovenamed purposes of his ministry, first as Saviour of the world, in a secular sense; secondly as the Redeemer of his people, and then as Conqueror in the world of spirits.

This series of supernatural events is, as I think, misunderstood as to its purport, when it is imagined to have been an interposition, requisite indeed for launching a New Religion in the world, and for giving it an initial impulse; but which, now that the Gospel has got a firm footing among the nations, has outlived its purpose, and may, not only safely but conveniently, and with advantage, be suffered to fall out of notice and to be forgotten. Any such supposition as this—entertained as it seems to be by some who profess themselves to be Christians—is, in my opinion, an error which is the fruit of modes of thinking that are shallow and nugatory; and which gives rise to various misapprehensions, fertile in false doctrine.

We have said that CHRIST has entered upon the platform of the human system—even of this secular course of things—embracing the well-being of men singly, and the welfare and progress of communities, with the benign purpose of effecting thereupon a gradual, but extensive and deep-working regeneration. As Benefactor of those whose term of existence is three score years and ten, and as the Reformer of nations which, although they have longevity, have no after life, He has gained a hearing for principles the vitality of which is such that they germinate even in the most

rugged soils, and spring up and bear fruit and scatter their seeds under even the most inclement skies.

These renovating principles, contrary as they are to the baser impulses and to the ingrain desires of human nature, have often been contradicted with the intention of expelling, and of utterly putting them out of the way of interference with the better-loved interests of the day and hour. Yet they live as we see, and from time to time they come forth with as fresh an energy as at the first: nay, with more energy than at the first; because, in each successive impact upon the human system, they fall upon a mass which these same principles have brought into a condition favourable to the impression that is next to be made upon it.

It would seem to be a matter of course, at this point, to specify those ethical principles, or, as we might call them, those edicts of the Christian system which are properly its characteristics, and which, so far as they take effect upon the course of affairs in the world do so, by universal acknowledgment, in the right direction; that is to say, in imparting force to every dictate of justice, humanity, self-denial, temperance, and purity. But it is superfluous to introduce any such specifications, for we are saved this labour by those who, wishing to disparage Christianity, are wont to say that, as to the ethical principles he taught, Jesus of Nazareth has advanced nothing but what had been already said, and said in a better manner, by the great writers of antiquity; or even by Jewish teachers, and by Chinese philosophers. If indeed this be so, then, on all hands, it is agreed that the morality of the Gospel is coin-

cident with principles that are held and professed by the leading minds of the most cultured races. This is enough; or if anything more were affirmed it would be in such terms as these—it would be said—'We do not need Christianity as a system of morals; for we all know and feel whatever is good—whatever is simply of an ethical quality, in the Gospels and the Epistles.' This then is enough; and hence it appears that Christ, as the Reformer of the human system in its secular aspect, takes up and authenticates those well-understood principles which, as soon as they are heard, approve themselves to the consciences of men, and which the sages of all times have recognised and taught. This is as it should be, and on this ground, it appears, there can be no controversy.

That the teaching of an ethical Reformer should be consentaneous with the better feelings and convictions of men, as embodied in the sayings and teachings of minds of the highest order, is what we may well look for as the FIRST requirement in one who comes forward to regenerate a world that has fallen into disorder.

A second requirement in the qualifications of such a Reformer is this—that, in giving expression to these dictates of universal morality, he shall use categorical forms, and not such as are conditional or inferential. His style will be this—'I say unto you'—and 'This is my commandment.' But then the necessary adjunct of an authoritative tone is—the affording proper evidence that it is rightfully assumed.

It has been usual, on the part of Christian advocates, to say, that Christ sets a bold foot upon the ground of

the world, as if proprietor of the soil; and that he issues laws—as a Master, not maxims—as a sage. In no case does he ask leave to be listened to, or aim to conciliate attention. Love is indeed in his demeanour, and in every act of his life; but stern law is on his lips, and it is at our peril that we turn away the ear from him who speaks as none but the 'one Lawgiver' may speak.

Christ, as the founder of a system of mundane Ethics, revises and overrules all bygone moralities, issuing anew whatever is of unchangeable obligation, and consigning to non-observance or oblivion whatever had a temporary force only, or a local reason. With a touch—with a word—a word full of far-reaching inferences, he rules the ages to come; and he so sends morality forward—he so launches it into the boundless futurity of the human system on earth, as that it shall need no redressing, no complementing, no retrenchment, even in the most distant eras.

This is done—not by systematic codification, but by the characteristic practice of *instancing* at the critical points, wherever an ambiguity is to be excluded. Beauty of contour, in the human form, is secured by the ligaments at the joints, and by adhesions of the integuments to the bony structure at places. It is so that, in Christ's apothegms, and in his apologues, and in his pointed replies to sophistical questions, he imparts a divine symmetry to his body of laws.—Christ's law wears the grace of Heaven, albeit it is firmly knit together, as law must be, if it is to hold a place in a world such as this.

Is then Christ's morality a good morality as related

to the well-being of men in this present life? You find fault with it—raising objections on this or on that ground. But your adverse judgment can have little significance, nor can it carry much weight in this instance; for an appeal may be made from your captious criticism to the catholic judgment of mankind. It is true that we all of us are apt to kick at Christ's law, and to resent it, in our worse moods of mind; but then we all give in to it and approve it, in our better moods. At moments we defend ourselves against its application to ourselves; and we look about for pleas and grounds of exception when it stands upon the pathway of our selfish or sensual desires; yet we are prompt to wish that we could arm this same law with thunder when another's selfishness, or his lawless passions threaten our life, or peace, or property.

In the course of those upheavings which the western nations have passed through, in the lapse of centuries, Christ's morality has still floated uppermost, and has held its position in the opinion of nations, as being better than any other morality with which it might be compared. In the social condition of communities those things which now rend the heart of the philanthropist, and which perplex the statesman, are those in which Christ's law is set at naught, and in which, if it were applied to them, sufferings would be mitigated—oppressions would wear themselves out, or be renounced immediately; and so the problem which baffles legislation would resolve itself as if by spontaneous sublimation. Christ's law, when it takes effect as the principle of social well-being, *underlays* legislation by the substitution of deeper motives for motives that are shallow; and it

overlays legislation by establishing conventional proprieties of behaviour, and by diffusing a refinement and a sensitiveness, as to conduct, which have the effect of banishing enactments and penalties from the thoughts of men, in the ordinary routine of domestic and public life. Only let Christ's law come into position, first as a fixed principle, and then as a suffused influence, and thenceforward legislation would retire within its limits, just as a needful authority in defining those reciprocative interests and functions which are indifferent, as to morality.

We are so used to think of Christianity as a RELIGION —related to the invisible and future life—which doubtless is its *essential* character, that it demands an effort of abstraction to think of it merely as a mundane, or secular religion, sustaining itself indeed upon beliefs concerning the invisible and the future, yet achieving an end which does not in fact stretch out beyond the present life.

If Christianity be not from Heaven, in the sense in which it claims to have come thence, then its author, individually, is entitled to the immeasurable glory of having devised and put upon a course of continuous vitality a mundane religion which, as to its power, and as to the intimate hold it takes upon the deepest principles of human nature, is, when set beside the ancient theisms, what the summer's sun is, as compared with an arctic aurora.

Let us then take it so just now, that Christianity is the product of a human mind—a benevolent mind—intending to benefit mankind, and devising the means

of driving off the vicious polytheism of the nations, and also aiming to substitute an efficient belief for the inefficient abstractions alike of Eastern and of Grecian sages.

This intention supposed—then the author of Christianity did these things following:—First, he brought the Infinite and Supreme Being—the Creator and Ruler of the world, clearly and prominently from out of the haze and the ambiguities of metaphysical speculation. Theism had long laboured to do this—it had yearned to do it—it had laboured and yearned on this ground to give some contentment to the sorrowful longings of the human spirit, and to find a balm for its woes; and also to screen the terrified imagination of guilty man from horrors. Very slender success had attended any of these earnest endeavours. The crowd of men was in fact sent back from the walks of philosophy, and they were told to procure for themselves what help they might, at the hands of priests, and in the frequenting of altars and the besieging of shrines.

Christ—we are now thinking of Him only as the author of a secular religion—effected His purpose by bringing men into contact with a well-defined conception of a Personal Being—infinite, incomprehensible, and yet near to each human spirit—to each spirit a Father, 'seeing in secret,' and accessible by prayer. It was this vivid revelation—call it now a merely human conception—which, by its splendour put out the flickering candle of philosophy, and which, by its force overthrew altars, and sent gods and goddesses to seek a home thenceforward in the waste places of the earth; or they

were left to shrink back into their own marbles:—they vanished from the real world, and were to be found only in books that are now the portion of schoolboys.

If Christianity be a religion for this present life, then it takes possession of the human spirit precisely at those points whereat a religion first makes its entrance, and which also are the last holding-places of religious feeling with men who are endeavouring to throw off their belief.—These are—the consciousness of guilt—the consciousness of weakness, and the experience of suffering, impelling us, whether we will or not, to believe in the *speciality* of the Providential government of the world, and to trust in, and to use, the instrument of prayer, as a real means of obtaining deliverance—relief—solace. It is quite true that there is a class of sophisticated and debauched minds that do succeed in reasoning themselves out of these beliefs:—there are men who, with a suicidal wantonness, having applied logical scissors to the nerves of the moral life, do declare, and may, with truth, say it, that they are conscious of no feeling which might lead them to look for help in God.

So it may be with a few; but so it is not, nor ever can be, with human nature, taken at large. Men and women in their seasons of hope and fear, of changeful weal and woe;—man, while he carries in his heart a conscience, and while he is liable to a thousand ills, must somewhere find a religion.

Christ, the benefactor of the world, in giving men a religion, does not recognize, as if they deserved refutation, any of those sophisms that contradict our belief in Providence, and that would silence prayer, as if it

could be of no avail: on the contrary, He gives prominence, in the most distinct and emphatic manner, to three principles, which in truth might be regarded as the characteristics of His system, namely, first—That there is forgiveness of sins with God; secondly—That the welfare of the individual man is watched over and provided for by God our heavenly Father, even in relation to the smallest incidents; and, thirdly—That 'the Father of spirits' hears prayer, and *yields Himself to it*, and that He is accessible to *importunity*. These are the constituents of a Belief such as men have need of in this present life.

When, as now, we are thinking of Christianity only as a secular religion, then, without instituting inquiry as to the *truth* of the doctrine it teaches concerning a future life (which inquiry can be pertinent only when we regard it as heaven-descended) we are bound to take account of what are the main elements of the scheme, namely—the promise and the threat of a world to come —even a retributive immortality.

The way in which this promise and this threat are propounded, and then the mode of balancing, both the promise and the threat, with our instinctive sense of justice, demands to be noticed; for this adjustment has a deep meaning, and it has been too little regarded.

The future retribution—even the alternative of absolute weal, or woe, and each of these carrying with it the momentum of a boundless duration—how have these fearful conceptions been employed by the Author of the Christian system?—He has brought an awful Eternity to bear upon a mundane religious institute! and may we

not use this word, *awful*, as applicable not merely to the threat, but even to the promise? In truth, can we look onwards to an endless existence as our destiny, under *any* condition, and not tremble?—how shall this instinctive fear be relieved from feelings of dismay?

The word—Eternity must here be accepted in the fulness of its popular sense; for assuredly any terms that are used in conveying to mankind at large a secular religion, must be understood to bear none other than a popular or ordinary interpretation. Whatever those exceptions may be to which the more mature critiiscm of some future time may give support, or whatever the qualifications which a better biblical induction may introduce, there will ever stand before Christianized nations, in the teaching of Christ, an absolute alternative, which He affirms to await those of the human family that have come within its influence; that is to say—a state of permanent well-being, or a condition of irretrievable suffering and damage in the future life; and this as the consequence of our behaviour in this life, or of our moral and spiritual condition when we leave it.

Those who have had much practical concernment with human nature, such as it is, and who understand the instability of the moral principle in the minds of men and women—such as they are, will be ready to grant that no affirmation of the future life which should be ambiguous, or which should fall short of being *absolute*, on this side, or on that, would be likely to take any effect at all upon the mass of minds. The supposition of a future state which should have no boundary between a condition absolutely good, and the contrary,

would be snatched at as eligible on all those perilous occasions when the impulses of the sensuous and selfish life are balancing against the vague and remote good of the life future. To give force to motives acting under this disadvantage, they must carry with them this idea of *fixedness*, as belonging to the future retributive state.

But now among those moral intuitions which are the hopeful distinction of human nature, there is a profound sense of truth, and fitness, and order, and justice, which looks for a doctrine of quite another sort, as requisite for establishing the equilibrium of the mind—and especially of minds the most sensitive towards whatever is good. Provision is accordingly made in the Christian scheme for satisfying this moral necessity.

This is done distinctly, and very boldly, in the teaching of Christ, on those occasions when He gives expression to the doctrine of an exactly adjusted, and an evenly meted out retribution—both of premium and penalty—such as shall in nothing fall short of a balance-keeping recompense of good deeds, on the one hand, and of punishment on the other. He declares that there shall be such a retribution as shall approve itself to every well-constituted mind;—only that, on *this* side, considerations of ignorance or of disadvantage shall be admitted to mitigate, or to overrule, the reckoning.

This doctrine stands before us in the Gospels quite as sharply defined as does the other doctrine of grace; and it is this last-named principle that satisfies those instinctive notions of even-handed justice—of strict impartiality—of fitness—order—truth, which (except where sophistry has paralysed the moral nature) take

effect in every human breast, and form a groundwork upon which conscience lodges itself, and on which it rests its leverage.

But now do we not discern an incongruity in these two beliefs? Does not the one doctrine cut across the path of the other, and seem to contradict, or to dislodge it? Theologians of all schools have believed that they saw this contrariety; and to meet the difficulty thence arising, they have rejected, or evaded, or ignored the one or the other of these prime elements of the Christian ethics. Here has been the reef upon the sharp ridges of which logical Theologies have stuck fast among the breakers. Systems—such as might show a rotund outline and might be moulded into symmetry by scientific manipulation—must, of course, profess to be able to steer clear of these rocks, on either hand. Meantime humble-minded, intelligent, and non-logical readers of Christ's discourses and parables, instead of finding themselves troubled by the presence of any such incongruity —instead of thinking His teaching incoherent, find in it the rest of their spirits—find there the principle of a genuine harmony, or moral rest. On the one hand, the prospect of an irreversible alternative of happiness or woe takes effect, with unabated force, upon the religious instincts—giving intensity to the religious life. On the other hand, the counter doctrine, which is not less distinctly brought into view, meets the requirements of a conscience that is sensitive, well informed, and exercised among and upon the duties and trials of real life.

But why does not Christ, the Teacher, Himself fill

up the chasm in His religious system? why does He not show us how two announcements, so dissimilar in their apparent meaning, may be reconciled? Did He not foresee the offence which the logical reason would here stumble at? As a human teacher, or sage, He would no doubt have foreseen this difficulty, and in some way He would have secured His religion against objection at this point. But He does not do this—not even by a word.

If we should be willing to think of Christ as more than a sage, then we may ourselves readily supply an explanation of the omission, in this manner.—We may suppose, either that the mode in which the two principles shall take effect in the future life may be such as could not be intelligibly presented to the human mind in its present stage;—or that, even if this might be done, such a revelation would include more than could now be set before us for our good. So long, therefore, as Christ, the Teacher of morals, is listened to by mankind, the two doctrines, each carrying the force that belongs to it—apart from the other, will continue to bear upon religious minds, and will preserve in them, such a state of moral acquiescence.

We have spoken of Christ's doctrine of a future life, and especially of its threatening aspect, on the supposition that this religion has sprung from a human mind, and has been contrived for effecting purposes relating to this present life only. Thus regarded, the terms in which this doctrine is conveyed must be accepted in their obvious and popular sense. But when they are taken in this sense, they carry a meaning from the

pressure of which we are driven to seek relief—if relief may so be had, in criticism;—or if not so, in some mitigating hypothesis; or if this will not help us, then we are tempted to reject Christianity on this very score. There is, however, another source of help under the intensity of this weight, which, as it is easy to foresee, may unfold itself in the course of an improved method of biblical interpretation; and it is of this sort.—

—Biblical *criticism* has already reached a stage far in advance of the position which it occupied only a few years ago; and perhaps more ought not now to be exacted of it than it has actually accomplished. Yet there is a movement which is not merely desirable, nor merely possible, but very likely to come about. This is a thorough emancipation of biblical interpretation from the trammels that have been imposed upon it by polemical theologies. When this liberation shall have been effected, the utterances of Scripture will take a new hold of the human mind—accepted as true in their simplest meaning; and then it may be that a counterpoising of moral and spiritual principles will develope itself in a manner that shall give rest to the heart, even although no systematic coherence can be secured for scientific theology.

Let us apply this supposition to the case before us. Why has not Christ's explicit teaching concerning an impartial and rigorous future retribution, touching all men, hitherto taken the place which of right belongs to it in our theologies? Why? It is because we could not allow it to come into any such position without risk to

the counter doctrine of an absolute alternative of good or evil; or without giving an advantage they would snatch at, to our antagonists, on the right hand, and on the left.

But let the time come when all such unworthy influences shall be discarded as they deserve, and when all such jealousies shall be dispelled by a salutary fear lest, personally, we be found flattering ourselves among delusions; and then, this potent Christian element—working its way into the core of our now relaxed Christianism—probing and wounding our conceit of individual impunity—breaking in upon the dreams of self-love, and discharging its anodynes; and then a health-giving apprehension, of which our own individual moral condition—and not the fate of other men, will be the object, will dissipate the morbid moodiness which had so often sent us on a bootless search after some hitherto unthought-of and softened etymology of the *αἰώνιος* of our Greek Testament.

Besides, this same faithful mode of dealing with ourselves—an alarmed conscience holding a candle as often as we read our Bibles—will bring before us the truth that, in its application to the millions around us—even to the unprivileged and the untaught millions of our brethren—a fearless interpretation of Christ's doctrine concerning the impartial future retribution, avails immensely more in the clearing up of the difficulties that have saddened our meditative hours, than does, or than can, any imaginable novelty of interpretation, even the most lax that should be put upon obnoxious phrases in the Gospels.

It has been usual to think of Christ's announcements of future punishment in relation to their direct bearing upon morals; and the question asked has been how far this threat may have operated as a restraint upon the passions of men. On this ground appeals have been made to facts, in support of opposite conclusions. With this much-worn question I have nothing now to do, nor am inclined to advance an uncalled-for opinion upon it. But there is a permanent and a very extensive product of those awful declarations, which, though it be not obvious, and though it is seldom adverted to, is of unquestionable reality, and it may be traced in its operation upon every page of religious history. As often as we are comparing the ancient with the modern mind, and when we notice the characteristics of the two very dissimilar moods of the same human nature, this influence is recognizable.

The ancient civilization, as I have already said, (p. 67, and 77) with all its great and shining qualities—qualities which have secured for it so much glory—wanted that which places our modern civilization upon a far more solid basis, and which gives it perpetuity.

In the social system of cultured antiquity there was wanting an element of some kind—nor did it appear whence it could be drawn—which should confer upon the individual man, and upon woman also, a ground of self-esteem that should be exempt from arrogance:—there was needed too, in every man, a reason for respecting and promoting the welfare of other men which should stand firm irrespectively of any estimate of their individual merits: there was wanting some principle,

or impulse of personal courage and fortitude, which should be available for the feeble as well as for the strong, and which should arm the individual man, without making him pugnacious, and make him unconquerable without making him sullen:—there was wanting in the ancient mind, a motive so solid as that the loftiest virtues might rear themselves upon it as a basis, and yet show no contempt of others: there was wanting a ground of humility exempt from abjectness, and of grandeur of soul exempt from pride.

Christ, the Saviour of men as to this present life, has supplied this want in the most effective manner;—for He has planted in the hearts of those who trust Him a hope and a fear which surmounts, and which outmeasures every other hope, and which expels every other fear;—a fear too which gives an irresistible prompting to courage, and which sustains even the pusillanimous in a course of behaviour which the noblest spirits, without it, can barely emulate.

That dozen of men—ignobly born as most of them were, which followed Jesus in his circuits through Galilee and Judæa, had dreamed of palaces and princedoms—soon to be their own, when in truth, they were about to be sent forth upon a course of suffering intensely severe. It was therefore needful to arm them against this unlooked-for conflict, and such a preparation, as it included powerful motives of the happiest complexion, so did it embrace a dread so deep that it should be proof under the extremest wrench of bodily anguish. On the one hand, this Teacher had said—'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to

give you the kingdom:'—but on the other hand he had said—even to these his 'friends'—'Fear not them which can kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear;—fear him which hath power, after he hath killed, to cast into Gehenna; yea, I say unto you, fear him.' And what was this Gehenna?—it was the place where, according to the same Teacher, 'their fire is not quenched, and where their worm dieth not.'

Now we of this age may expound as we think fit these appalling words; or we may extenuate these phrases;—or, if we so please, let us cast away the whole doctrine as intolerable and incredible.—Let us do so; yet it is a matter of history—out of question, that the apostolic Church, and the Church too, of later times, took it, word for word, in the whole of its apparent value. It is true that several attempts were made to substantiate a mitigated sense; but it is certain that the language of Christ, in regard to the future life, was constantly on the lips of martyrs, throughout the suffering centuries. Often and often was it heard issuing from out of the midst of the fire, and it was lisped by the quivering lips of women and children while writhing on the rack.

These, then, were the actual fruits of Christ's doctrine of the 'wrath to come,' and it was by such means as these that the world was at length cleansed of the pest of licentious gods and goddesses. But there were other and later fruits of the same belief which have been not of less moment, albeit less direct, and less conspicuous.

An unclouded belief concerning the future life, with

its awful alternative of endless good or ill—a belief of inheriting a bright immortality by favour, not by merit —a belief of individual relationship to the Infinite and Eternal Being—a commingled or aggregate persuasion of this sort solves the problem that has been stated above; for it supplies to the individual man—and woman too—and child—it supplies a ground of self-esteem that is exempt from arrogance;—it furnishes a constant reason for respecting the welfare of others, standing good irrespectively of their individual merit; it conveys to the heart an impulse of personal courage, and of fortitude, available by the feeble as well as by the strong: it arms the individual man without making him pugnacious;—it renders him proof against despotism, but it does not make him sullen. This aggregate belief—the fruit of Christ's teaching—yields to the mind and to the heart, a basis upon which the loftiest virtues may rear themselves, without showing contempt toward others; and it supplies a ground of humility free from abjectness, and of greatness exempt from pride.

The ancient civilization, compared with the modern, that is to say, the civilization of the people of Western Europe, offers to the eye the prominent difference that results from the position of woman—her personal purity and dignity, and her consequent influence in society, generally, and in the domestic circle, specially. Now it ought not to be affirmed—for such an allegation could not be put beyond question by an appeal to facts —that this vast difference, with its incalculable consequences—favourable as they are to the stability of

modern nations—is *wholly* attributable to Christianity, either in the way of explicit injunction, or of moral influence. The social position of woman—her personal qualities and virtues—her place and her power, as wife and as mother, are the characteristics of certain races; and being so, they mark those races as destined for progress, and as susceptible of refinement; while on the contrary, the families or nations that want the same inborn distinction, are doomed to be stationary through thousands of years; or they are now melting away from the countries they once filled.

But in relation to the place which woman occupies, and to her qualification for filling it, these two affirmations are safe from contradiction, namely, first this, that, as often as Christianity is offered to the acceptance of nations which do not possess this mark of nobility, and as there can be no compromise on this ground, such races must either acquire—along with the new religion, this redeeming instinct; or if not, then Christianity retires from their borders; and when it does so, it consigns them to hopeless barbarism, or to gradual disappearance from among nations.

But secondly, this may be affirmed—that in any community (assumed to be noble in this special sense) in which the Gospel takes a firm hold of many minds, and in which it is publicly recognized as a final authority, it makes provision for securing the rights, the influence, and the personal dignity of woman—not indeed by legislating upon polygamy, adultery, concubinage; but in a far more effective manner—in truth

in the only mode that could be effective—namely, by imposing the restraints of personal virtue, purity, and continence upon man. Where men are virtuous, women will be pure; and where women are pure, they will hold the place that is due to them without the help of laws.

Now we need look no further than this in search of what should be regarded as the primary conditions of national well-being, and if we accept the two above specified conditions as sufficient, we might, in the manner following, put our theorem into form.—Given, a community within which many may always be found whose individuality is marked by profound religious convictions, and by corresponding moral sentiments; which they will adhere to, and will openly profess, even at the peril of life itself: thus, then, we have a guarantee for the maintenance of religious liberty within that community, and, through that, of civil and political liberty; and by means of these together, there will take place the highest developments of human nature, individually and socially.—Given *also*, a community within which certain evangelic dicta—such, for instance, as that comprehensive rule issued by Christ (Matthew v. 28), or that one by his minister, (Hebrews xiii. 4) are held to carry with them the awful sanction of Divine Law; and then, as the sure consequence, we have a social system which is sound at the core; and is not false and putrescent: we have a system within which the brightest and the best felicity which earth can yield to man shall be enjoyed in thousands of homes:—we have a social system within which, from thousands of sources—

obscure and illustrious, from cottages and from mansions, from attics and lodgings, from shop-parlours, and from halls of splendour, there shall spring forth, and shall spread themselves abroad perpetually, as well the stern virtues, as the soft, warm, and heavenlike affections; even the smiling bright-eyed graces of innocent youth, and the tearful and yearning sympathies of matron life; in a word, all the bosom-heaving joys, and all those soul-healing griefs which render earth such, that men, while in the fruition of so much pure good, feel and know that there must be a Heaven to come, where earth's blossoms shall ripen into undecaying fruits.

But now as to all this CHRIST-GIVEN earthly good, on what terms is it to be had, or in compliance with what conditions is it to be made sure to any people?

Nothing more simple or certain than the reply:—the one condition is this, that CHRIST, the 'author and finisher' of a Faith carrying with it these principles of Earthly Well-being, shall be thought of and listened to as God's authenticated minister, so as that we are sure that not one of His words shall fall to the ground, or fail to take effect upon ourselves, here, or hereafter.

In other words, there must be available, in a form adapted to the reasonable requirements of an instructed people—EVIDENCE SUFFICIENT, on the ground of which the convictions of such a community may securely rest. BELIEF is the one condition which we need: grant it; and the consequences above named follow.

If Christ be trusted in—if Christ be feared as He who shall come to be our judge, and if He be loved

as our Deliverer, He becomes at once 'the Saviour of all men,' and He is then the Giver—in this present life—of Liberty, Love, Virtue, and whatever of peace and felicity this life may be made to embrace in its course of seventy years.

THE GOSPEL MIRACLES ARE THE FORCE OF THE CHRISTIAN ETHICS.

I COME round to my main purpose, which is to show the bearing of the supernatural element of the Christian system upon its perpetual influence in the world, as the Source, and the impulsive cause of secular good and of earthly felicity to the human family; or of solace and mitigation, as the case may be. Remove the miracles of Christ from the Gospels, or, in other words, reduce the evangelic histories, by aid of some unintelligible hypothesis, to the level of a jumble of myths, credulity, and extravagance, and then Christianity, as to any effective value in relation to any humanizing and benevolent influence, will go to its place—a place a few degrees perhaps above the level of some passages in Epictetus and M. Aurelius.

Whatever may be the estimated value of the best pages of classical antiquity—considered as a moral force *now in operation* for the good of mankind—then the residual value of the Gospels and Epistles—after the miracles have been driven off from them in the furnace of historic criticism, will be—may you not grant it? about twice as much! Let us ask, what, in relation

to the support of vegetable and animal life, would be the value of a daylight that should be twice as good as moonlight?

The Gospel is a FORCE in the world available for the good of mankind, not because it is Wisdom, but because it is—a Power. Whence then comes its power? Or whence will it come after you have persuaded the world that, henceforward, in the great book of history, it must be catalogued along with frauds?

It is a customary truism to say that a power of enjoyment and a power of suffering—necessarily correlatives—are *directly* as the quantity of the intellectual and moral faculty, and in proportion to the development of both. There may always be room therefore for the question how far, in a world such as this, abounding as it does in sources of suffering, an increase of intellectual and moral faculty, and the development of them, are truly to be desired. This question we leave where it stands; but this is certain, that, in the structure of human nature a provision is made for the proportionate enlargement of those sympathies which bind us together, in weal or woe, and which widen so much the interval between the cultured man and the savage. Are we not all capable both of enjoying and of suffering a thousand times more than is the troglodite?—yes, but then we may each of us reckon upon receiving all sorts of aids and solaces—substantial help and tearful love, in our hour of suffering; while he—the savage—is left at the last, to be eaten alive by wild dogs or vultures.

Nevertheless, while it is true that the natural impulses of sympathy do, in a general way, keep pace with

the expansion of the intellectual and moral faculties, it is also true that the actual force available at any time, for the relief of want, and for the assuagement of pain and woe, needs a momentum to be supplied to it from some energy that is *foreign to itself*. It is the presence of this supplementary force, drawn from a definite religious belief, which makes the difference between the powerless philanthropy of the best times of ancient refinement, and the laborious benevolence of modern Christianized communities. Yet the momentum supplied by the Gospel is a force which disappears—which is gone for ever, when Belief in its authority, *as attested by miracles*, is destroyed.

This assertion might seem to need no proving, but it may admit of something to be said in the way of illustration.

It is affirmed, on your side, that no such event as a miracle has ever occurred in the world's history; or even that, if it had occurred, it could not have been so reported to us as should reasonably command our assent. Furthermore, let it be granted that the mass of mankind have in all ages admitted such reports greedily, and have done so in the exercise of little discrimination. No allegations of this sort affect my present argument. The evangelic miracles have, in fact, been accepted as true, from age to age, and they are so accepted at this present time; and the evidence in support of them is of such force that it does command the assent of educated men, who at the same time reject the entire mass of that spurious stuff which crams Church histories. This being the fact, the supernatural element

of Christianity is an extant efficient cause, working itself out *now* in the movements of every Christianized community. Christian benevolence—expressing itself in a thousand forms of appliance, as related to the ten thousand phases of human suffering and degradation, is not a vapid sentiment with a tear on its cheek; nor is it an ambulatory wisdom, nor is it a schirrous humanity—grown upon political economy; but it is a calculable resource, occupying a principal place in the estimate of a people's means of regeneration and progress. Belief in the supernatural lifts this estimate: disbelief sinks it below zero. BELIEF is the spring or reason of practical benevolence in a country: DISBELIEF is the azote of the moral world.

Whether it be done cordially, or done grudgingly, men do yield themselves—they yield their personal services, or their purses, or both, to the assessments of *authoritative Christian benevolence.* To some extent the purest and most heavenlike impulses, and to a great extent, conventional practices, feed Christian charity, public and private, and keep it agoing; but both alike take their rise from a belief which is held to carry with it the weight of Divine law—law that shall take effect upon us in a future life.

How is it as to a Church-going community, in a country like England? Among these Church-going folks there are—first, the large class of the inert, the thousands—young and old, who yield themselves to the forces that are brought to bear upon them. Then there are the repugnant, who are held within the Christian-charity pale by nothing better than inferior or sinister

motives. These reluctant persons take a share in what is good, at the impulse of motives that are ready to snap at any instant. Then there are the few, the loving, the heart-whole, the BELIEVING;—those whose presence is the life-blood of the body social and moral.

Now with these three classes in view, filling churches once a-week in pews—let me suppose that we had the power to try the two experiments following:—

First, let it be imagined that, from some unsuspected source, there has come up evidence, palpably contradictory of the Gospel history, as to its supernatural element. A flaw in the evidence has been brought forward—a flaw of such a kind as could leave no place for explanation. This discovery so acts upon the Church-going class as that the religious persuasion of the body entirely collapses. Belief is gone; that is to say, all feeling toward Christianity as a revelation from God—miraculously attested, and which hitherto has claimed our reverential regard, has ceased. We still have in our hands the same Text, with all its excellent maxims, and its elevating sentiments, and its eloquent passages. But the faded parchment no longer entitles us to an estate—the document no longer alarms us with the threat of pains in a future life.

The Church bell goes the Sunday morning next after this fatal discovery has been noised abroad, and, scarcely knowing why, the congregation obeys the call. But at a year's end shall we find these same pews filled with families—taking a part in worship, and listening to a preacher? I think not. In one such Church there will be enacted some sensuous theatric superstition;—in an-

other a lecturer will be taking his turn; and there will be a platform, and a chairman, and a debate; and the question will be—I will not put it in words, for I fancy of what quality that question will be. You will tell me that the pulpits from which fanatics have been driven will henceforward be occupied by philosophers—that is to say, by men who will set about mending the world, and keeping it in repair by application of pure Theisms: and so may a man employ himself in carving a block of granite with a penknife; or in moulding a mass of clay with a straw!

We have lost our standing of unmeasured hope and fear, grounded upon an attested message from God; and now what has become of the inert multitude? Will they be listeners to your theistic gospel? or will they comprehend the nihilism of Hegel? This mass will have subsided into its own slough of pleasure-loving sensuousness and sensuality.

But the repugnant, where are they? So long as religious opinion hemmed them in, they were restrained or abashed to a great extent. But now they are told that all shall be well with them in the end—that the alarms of conscience are nervous misgivings, which should be treated with sulphate of quinine and the shower-bath. They are assured that philosophers, although they are not agreed upon the question whether 'absorption' or 'annihilation' is to be the next stage of the 'I' or the 'ME,' yet are unanimous in the opinion that the one or the other of these desirable issues awaits us: certainly not the fabled immortality of the Christian superstition!

I ask you—and I ask you to give me an outspoken answer to this question—whether, in the actual state of abstract Philosophy, as it is now taught among those who reject Christianity, any announcement that should be morally better than this can be made when you convoke the Church-going inert multitude to listen to their last sermon, and to receive the philosophic benediction?

But what has become of the cordial Few—whither has fled the life-blood of the social body? They have sickened and fainted on the spot where those sounds of dismay first fell upon their hearing. Their hearts broke at the blow. They can no more lift a hand in works of charity; they can no more set a foot forward upon the flinty path of self-denying love. The wretched and the hungry and the sick call for them; but they are as the dead that hear not.

I will now imagine a contrary course of things;—not a sudden enhancement of religious feeling, arising we know not whence, or why, and after a while subsiding; but what might fitly be called—a Restoration of Belief; that is to say, a confirmed rational confidence in the Divine authority of Christianity as attested by the miracles that are recorded in the Gospels.

In what manner such a renovation of the belief of an instructed people might be likely to come about, I need not now stay to inquire. It is sufficient to say that, whereas the critical and historic argument in support of this belief stands, at this time, quite intact, having of late years passed through the severest process of adverse analysis, almost any incidental occurrence—almost any casual coincidence turning up, unlooked for, which

should arrest attention, and fix it upon the facts of the evangelic history, would suffice for bringing on the sort of revolution I am now thinking of.

What is needed just now is not the creation or the evolution of a new body of evidence, but only the awakening and riveting of attention upon that which has long been in our hands. In a dark night a party of travellers has come—they know not where; but they feel that a pavement is under their feet: it is affirmed among them, and it is denied, that they have reached the principal square of a city:—at the instant a flash of lightning reveals the broad fronts of palaces, with a background of domes, spires, castles; and thus all argument is at an end.—I think that at this very moment, when a cloud of atheistic darkness has settled itself down upon continental Europe, the skirts of which chill these islands, the incidental coming up of any corroborative facts, which should engage the attention of educated men, would be enough to dissipate this gloom, as affecting ourselves, and to refresh and restore our confidence in the Truth which, as a nation, we profess.

But grant such a refreshment to be possible, and imagine it actually to have taken place, and then—as if awaking from a dream—as if shaking off a lethargy, we feel that the unseen—the future, as set before us in the Gospel, is near at hand, and that this future is what awaits each of us at every instant. Now the entire consequence, personal and social, of such a return to a vivid Christian Belief goes over to the side of whatever promotes our individual well-being, and the welfare of the community; that is to say, Christ then becomes the

Saviour of men when his claim to be such is assented to in the world. And then when this claim is allowed, the miraculous attestations upon which it rests come into a causal connection with that earthly blessedness, of which the Christian system contains the elements.

Without taxing the imagination for aid, we may trace this connection in its operation from a remote age to the present time. The sun was going down behind the Galilean hills, and the waters of the lake were darkening, when a transaction had place which, from that moment to this, has never ceased to yield its results in the form of calculable funds, whence the hungry and wretched throughout all time since have drawn large supplies.

Jesus, seeing the multitudes, had compassion on them, because they had continued crowding around him, day after day, until their stores were spent.—He marshalled them in companies—for He, as his race, was a lover of order; He blessed the bread that then came to His hand, and from that hand distribution was made until all were satisfied. There are two things noticeable in this event. First, there is the authentication which it contains of those better impulses of our nature which prompt us to consider the welfare and comfort of others, and to do whatever may be done to meet the occasion which at any time awakens compassion. This is the *doctrine* of this history. Next comes its legislative import. To find this we turn over a page in the Gospels, and there are forewarned that, in the course of Christ's administration of mundane affairs this shall be held to be a judicial test of character—'I was an hun-

gered and ye fed Me;' or, on the contrary, 'I was an hungered and ye gave Me no meat.' But if this is to be the rule of the future judgment, then the feeding of the four thousand is not merely an exemplification of benevolence, which we may do well to imitate;—it is much more than this. Whence comes then the deeper meaning of this instance? It springs directly from the miracle. If this history be true, then it is true that we are yet to be dealt with according to the abovenamed rule, which we find to be in that case made and provided.

Now through all the years of these eighteen centuries past, this history has been accepted as true—and moreover the judicial inference has been duly appended to the history among Christian nations, and it is so now, and the result now, as always it has been, is seen in ten thousand 'works of mercy' as they are called—public and private—stated and occasional; the charities administered by 'committees'—the crust given at the cottage gate—the alms, in ways innumerable, through which, at the prompting of natural sympathies, strengthened, deepened, *enforced* by the Christian rule, and by men's belief in the Christian future, the unblessed—the luckless, the unhelpful, the feeble, the decrepit, the diseased, the maimed, the blind, the deaf, the insane, receive such help as their several cases admit of, and which the hand, heart, and purse of their fellows may afford. The Evangelist tells us that, in one of the instances now referred to, the number of the men was about five thousand, beside women and children; or say, they were seven thousand altogether: now if we take each unit of that number, and give it a place at the

head of hundreds of thousands, we shall still fall short of the truth in computing the millions of the needy who, in the direct line of moral causation, have, through the course of time, eaten their bread daily from those Galilean baskets. The doctrine—the precept, the example, alone, would not have taken effect in any such manner as this; but it has been the DOCTRINE—authenticated by the MIRACLE: it has been—not the mere teaching;—but the authoritative teaching.

There is a feeling which is natural, and therefore not in itself to be reprehended, impelling us to ask that where legislation carries with it the most extreme consequences—touching us individually, the *authentication* should not come to us remotely, or in an ambiguous manner; but that it should touch every man's consciousness, either through his senses or his understanding, in a mode that shall be reasonably certain. Hence the demand so often repeated—'Show us a sign from Heaven.' Give to *us*—even to the men of this generation, a *proof* that the things written in the Book are sure, and that we shall find it to be so hereafter.

I need not here reiterate the customary replies to this demand, which, if they be fairly weighed, should I think be deemed good and sufficient. But while, as now, we are thinking of Christianity as a *secular reforming force*, intended by its Author to take effect through the lapse of ages, then, in the mode that has been chosen for establishing the authority of the system in the minds of men, throughout all time, there is visibly a proof, not merely of a profound knowledge of the structure of the human mind, but also a foreknow-

ledge (how wonderful if its author were such only as you suppose him) of those revolutions in the intellectual as well as the moral condition of cultured nations which the flow of centuries was destined to bring about! To me it seems as if the special mood or temper of this very half century in which our lot is cast, had been in the view of HIM whose name this system carries.

It is trite to say that during ages of popular ignorance, and of its attendant credulity, *genuine* miracles could scarcely, under any conditions, have been made to stand infallibly distinguished from the spurious; and yet, unless they did so stand, their *legislative authority* would be vitiated. If I go back to the times of the venerable Bede, or of Gregory of Tours, my mood of mind is such that a miracle would be congruous with it; and I look at it in its own light;—it does not put me aghast. But then if I belong to that age I might have no habits of thought—no discriminative temper, impelling, or indeed enabling me to deal discretively with the wonders that are daily reported or shown off before me. The genuine miracle, therefore, would retain little or none of its distinctive force.

When, from that twilight age I come down to these days, even to the times of Laplace and of Playfair, in which PHYSICAL SCIENCE bears sway, and when a larger PHILOSOPHY is out of favour—at such a time, the occurrence of a miracle would be a shock or a violence, because there is nothing of homogeneous quality in my present intellectual condition. Whether I would have it so or not, I am now governed, and in truth am overawed, by the dry, rigorous, and exceptive temper of

physical Science, and by the soulless and boastful mood of mechanical achievement. Doing homage, as I cannot help doing, to this spirit of the times, the supernatural has moved off far beyond my utmost range of thought. But let me not forget that this now-uppermost mood is the mood of a period only: it is not to be thought of as if it were the normal condition of human nature; far from it! Aristotle is not a model man; it were far better to take Plato as such. It is indeed a great thing to resolve nebulæ, and to construct steam navies, and to convey thought over land and across oceans, and round the equator through galvanic wires:—these things are glories if we are comparing our own time with any times that are past: but then they ought to be accounted woeful disgraces if we hear them boasted of as feats that symbolize the powers of the human mind in its highest possible condition! If, perchance, in the next age, PHILOSOPHY should dare to speak again, and should become bold enough to teach humility to physical Science, then man—spiritual and immortal as he is—might be trusted to witness miracles anew; and thus might he step forward into the place that becomes him, where he would calmly hold correspondence—as at the first—with a stage of the universe higher than this, and would be permitted to look onward toward that eternity, on the threshold of which his foot is even now placed. And yet perhaps it will always be true that, in proportion as men become consistently reasonable, and acquire the habitude of yielding themselves almost involuntarily to the conclusions of an authenticated practical logic, they will gladly accept, *as best for them*, the unchanging and

the unchangeable certainties of historic evidence; and being content with these, will cease even to desire recurrent revelations, as coming anew from the unseen world.

At this moment, a very little of the supernatural, taking place in the room next to that in which I am sitting, might shake my reason; for it would not find me in a state to yield my judgment or conscience to its bidding. Or, if it did not make the brain curdle, it would bring me under peril of a worse kind; for I might be tempted so to resist this sort of appeal as to do a damage, that must be irremediable, to the moral and religious constitution of the mind.

Quite of another sort would be an occurrence such as I have already supposed—namely—That, in the course of critical and historical studies, any residue of ambiguity still attaching to portions of the evangelic writings should be dispelled; while new corroborations, such as in the nature of things spring up when a genuine history is subjected to severe scrutiny, are continually presenting themselves:—*this* species of augmenting certainty, coming in upon the reasoning faculty in a mode the most congruous with it, in its present state, invigorates religious belief, and yet gives rise to no excitement;—faith is deepened, and is made to rest upon a basis, coextensive with the intellectual and moral faculties.

If at any time amid the toils and tumultuous strivings of the open world, or if, when too long exposed to the factitious excitements of intellectual society, or if when, well satisfied with earth's choicest enjoyments, I so rest in them as to forget the life future in the flowery enclosure of domestic sweetness—if at any such time

I suddenly awake to the infinite peril of losing my part in immortality, what I should ask of HIM who 'knoweth our frame,' and its frailty, would not be a new miracle, wrought in my sight, but an hour's reading of the narrative of the miracles of the apostolic age, with a fresh conviction that this record is true, and that in those wonders the hand of Omnipotence was indeed stretched out.

There is a feeling abroad that the world—or rather, those members of the human family that are progressive, have lately come into a position that is new, and full of promise. New conditions—marvellous indeed, attach to the mere mechanism of common life;—but more than this, deep sympathies, which were barely present to the consciousness of men in the last century, take effect upon benevolent minds in this. There is nothing that is not astir; every social interest is in its crisis:—the sedimentary deposits of past ages are heaving up, and are displaced. History has written out a long chapter of man's past fortunes, and a new leaf is even now rustling between her fingers. Thus far we are agreed; but not so as to what is to follow. Two roads diverge at this point. You are looking along one of these ways: my belief, as a Christian, impels me to look along the other. What precisely your anticipations are I do not know, nor need inquire whether they are bright or gloomy: perhaps they are alternately the one and the other, for this is likely to happen when

theories which we would wish to cling to are contending against the uniform testimony of experience.

As to my anticipations, though they are steadily bright, they are not unmixedly so; far from it: they much resemble one's prospects for a day's journey when, though the barometer has been slowly rising all night, the morning hour is much overclouded. There are two independent grounds of divination: the first is a secular calculation of a course of events which seems not improbable—all things now present being taken into the account; but a second source of conjecture is an outline of the world's way onward, which has been put into my hand from above, and on which I look with confidence: what I distrust is, not the outline, but my own manner of filling in the spaces.

Yet I am not so absurd as to sit down, with the pages of Isaiah, Daniel, and St. John before me, and attempt to write the Newspapers ten years in advance! This is a folly which has stood in the way, hitherto, of a proper use of the prophetic writings. I am no fortune-teller for kings, nor have any wish to peruse the palms of the 'great men and the captains;' but, from the general import, or, as we say, from the drift and upshot of the prophetic writings—those of the Hebrew Scriptures especially—I gather such things as these—and in specifying them, every diligent reader of the Bible will at once recollect the passages to which I might refer.—

—I look forward to a time when national distinctions of race, language, and geographical location shall continually be melting away, at least so far as they might be obstructive of the intercourse of the human family.

A sort of universalism—not empire—which a true understanding of the conditions of social well-being tends to bring about, is, I think, implied throughout the prophetic writings. On this ground I look for a time when Right for the many—or, better expressed, when RIGHT for ALL, shall be the sovereign principle in every community. As to Right for the *many*, the phrase has taken to itself a conventional meaning, which differs little from a periodic overthrow of society, such as may give the undermost class their harvest-time of plunder. But RIGHT for ALL, means social *stability*; and this one idea of STABILITY, as opposed to anarchy and to periodic convulsions, meets us in many places in the prophetic pages. As the consequence of this change for the better I look for a time when the material welfare, or the daily comfort and enjoyment of the many—or let us rather say of all, so that we may exclude that banditti-meaning which radicalism clings to—when this well-doing for all—this secure holding of the most needful things of life, shall be so much thought of as that it shall in fact realize itself in a continually more and more complete manner. Between the two influences of an iron sense of right and justice on the one hand, and of soft-hearted sympathies on the other, an intense feeling shall pervade the social mass, under the operation of which, want—still incident, as it must be, to man—and squalor, and houseless discomfort, and, what is worse—cellared wretchedness, and disease—shall always be in process of sublimation, and shall be driven off from the social mass, by the high internal temperature of the social body. A powerful feeling of uneasiness

at the sight or thought of privation and misery shall be always ridding the world of these ever-recurrent evils. I look for a time—not fabulous and impossible—not rosy and celestial—but earthlike and sunny, when every man—quite secure from violence, and moderately at ease, shall sit, in home style, under, or near to, as he likes best, his vine and fig-tree, none daring, or even wishing, to make him afraid. I do not look for a time, on this earth, when there shall be no surgeons' work to be done—no Hospitals, no Infirmaries, no police; but I do believe in an age of individual and domestic bliss, such as is pictured in some sweet odes and stirring paragraphs of my Bible. I believe in a time—yet to come, when HE who—shame upon Manichees, upon Ascetics, upon Fanatics of all sorts—'manifested His glory' by being a willing guest at a wedding, and then and there showing that Creation is His own—when HE shall bless the world by bringing at once His iron sceptre of righteousness and His law of love to bear upon the *temporal* good of all men. I look for a time, when He who is 'King of Peace' and also 'King of Righteousness,' shall rule the nations under both these titles; and when, as the consequence of the establishment of uncontradicted Truth, and of Reason, and of Right, bowed to and enforced, there shall be abundance of earthly felicity, to last until this planet shall have wound up its destined story.

In the course of those events that have marked the years of this century—that is to say, those *ostensible* matters which history takes account of—I scarcely discern the indications of the coming on of such an era

of mundane welfare. One may imagine, to-day, that things are taking a turn in this better direction; but to-morrow (as so many past to-morrows have done) will perhaps scatter every supposition of the sort, and break it up as a dream. But though the evolving fortunes of nations do not foreshow the golden age at hand, yet it is true that those who have been watching the unrecorded movements of the human mind—in Europe, throughout these fifty years, and who have been used to let down a line into the under-current, and have noted its shiftings, have come to think that those preparations — intellectual, moral, and political — which would be the proper precursors of a new and better era, have not only had a commencement, but have been making progress at an appreciable rate. I shall risk nothing on ground where it is so easy to fancy this and that, just as may suit one's purpose in an argument. There is, however, one of these preliminary movements which strictly belongs to my present subject, and to which (p. 242) a second time I will advert. What I mean is the approach of the antichristian and atheistic philosophy toward a fusion of the two.

We are just now looking at Christianity from the same level:—you are regarding it as an invention of man, because it is, you think, a scheme which two or three Jews of the times of Tiberius and Nero might easily have concocted. This is your belief, and I am consenting so to think of it, to serve a momentary purpose in an argument.

Now, while forcing myself into this false position, and persuading myself that the Gospel asserts nothing that

shall touch us in the next stage of our existence, then it is certain that, on grounds of secular philanthropy merely, nothing is so much to be wished for as the spread and restoration of this Christian Belief. It is manifest that a nation has an infinitely better prospect of coming into the enjoyment of peaceful good, while holding this belief, than it can have in rejecting it, and in taking in its stead—what is it?—Tell me, what is it that must be taken in its stead!

We therefore, on the Christian side, may well rejoice in witnessing what must issue in the final engulphing of the several antichristian Philosophies which are at present making a noise in the world. These schemes are forging themselves down the slimy incline that shall shoot them, one and all, into the bottomless slough of obsolete absurdities. You are acquainted, I may presume, with the course of abstract speculation in modern times, from Spinoza down to these days of the 'Positive Philosophy.' Now if we lay aside every feeling of *religious* anxiety—if we think of Theologic Science just as we think of any one of the physical sciences, then it is impossible that we should greatly differ as to what must be the issue of the present course of reasoning on the road of Disbelief.

We see—and you must see it as I do—intelligent and amiable men struggling to keep their footing on some ledge where they may stand—short of the gulph:—these honey-lipped gentlemen would gladly keep entire for themselves a Theism—patched with borrowings from the Gospels. But in labouring to this end they shift their articles of belief from year to year. At one time

they think they may grant a 'Resurrection of the Dead, and a Future Judgment;' but anon they come to think less favourably of these articles than once they did; or it has been demonstrated to them that any such persuasion involves the 'supernatural,' and cannot be retained unless they will choose to stand where they should be in peril of becoming Christians. It is well that there is always within the pale of intelligence a class of minds that, by fault of nature, want the analytic force which would enable them to foresee the inevitable issue of the lines of thought they are pursuing. Without these minds a chasm would yawn between Belief and Disbelief; but these gentle spirits bridge it over.

You well know that the endeavour to get rid of Christianity on the ground of historical criticism, has utterly failed. The historical problem is acknowledged to be unsolved on your side. You know, moreover, that, if certain positions are abandoned, which, if they are retained, we must in the end surrender ourselves to Christianity; then the alternative—as sure as any conclusion in science, is—a choice between Material Atheism, in its most grossly expressed form, or Idealistic Atheism; and this latter, if it has any meaning at all, may be summed up in some such manner as this;—'Whether there be any existence other and beside the 'Ego,' I do not know; or if there were any such other being, I could never come to know it. But then I do not *know* that I know even so much as this:—nay, to speak the whole truth at once—I do not even know that I do not know this, because, for ought I know, I *may* know that I do not know it.'

Putting out of view a proper religious regard for the souls of men, I might exult in witnessing this rush of our 'Leading Minds' 'down this steep place' into the gulph. The upshot of Abstract Speculation, on the side of those who reject the Intuitions of the human reason, and of the moral constitution, has now fully shown itself to be a wordy nothing, which, though it still clothes itself in sublime verbiage among our Teutonic neighbours, will never, in these lands of common sense, fail, after a little time, to be rejected with contempt as pompous nonsense.

This upshot of *Idealistic* Atheism, when recognised on all hands, will leave Christianity opposed to *one adversary only*—namely, Material Atheism—and *this* adversary, when left to put forth its proper nature, has never yet failed to work its will in brutal excesses of sensuality and cruelty.

THE SECOND INTENTION OF CHRIST'S MISSION, AS ATTESTED BY MIRACLES.

CHRIST, the Saviour of the world in a secular sense, made no formal profession of His intention to do what He has actually done for its benefit. He did not plainly say that He had come to civilize rude nations—to humanize savages, to abrogate slavery, to abolish polygamy, to bring into disuse judicial torture, to rid cities of the sanguinary exhibitions of the amphitheatre, to break up *caste*, and to set men forward on the course of free and hopeful improvement, on terms of brotherhood:—Christ said little of these purposes—great as they are; but now that we see what it is which His religion does for nations, if only it is allowed to take effect upon them in its own manner, we turn anew to the record of His sermons and parables, and there, without difficulty, we find the efficient principles of all these silent reforms, and we may trace each of them separately up to its source, in this or that word of power—whether it be precept or instance.

It is quite otherwise when the same PERSON comes to be regarded in His character as the Saviour—not of men, as occupants of a seventy years, but of man as immortal;

and so, as the Redeemer of those who, to the world's end, shall become willing to accept the free gift of immortality at His hands. On this ground there is no doubt or ambiguity as to the purpose to effect which Christ came into the world:—He came to seek and to rescue those who, in every age and country, shall 'hear His voice'—the voice of the 'Good Shepherd,' and hearing it, shall set forward upon the path which He trod, and which He opened for them; and so shall enter with Him upon the bright fields of eternal life. The Christian scheme, looked at on *this* side, wears an aspect of the most determinate simplicity. On *this* side no mystery attaches to the language of the Saviour; the mystery is only that which shrouds the conditions of the rescue, and still more, *its limits*. Saved or lost! who shall surmise what is the meaning of either of these words—the mere utterance of which, with thoughtfulness, staggers reason, and which, when brought to take a bearing upon those who are now walking side by side upon the smooth path of domestic fondness, rends the heart, and quite bewilders the moral instincts.

And yet, if we find ourselves entering upon a scene where meditation fails to guide us, we soon find that there is no way of retreat, and that our only course is onward—following the beckoning of HIM whose leading is ever toward the light. And now, as the scene is shifted, so does the PERSON stand revealed in another manner.—Let us pause for a moment, and well consider what it is that is before us. We must inquire concerning that PRINCIPAL TRUTH, which forms the substance of the Gospel. For my own part I could not attempt,

nor in fact should have any motive sufficiently impulsive for attempting, the task of setting forth the Christian evidences on any other ground than that of an unexceptive ORTHODOXY. The use of this term, which carries with it an ascertained historic meaning, saves many circumlocutions; it excludes ambiguities, and it exempts a writer, who wishes to keep clear of what would be a theological or exegetical argument, from the necessity of giving expression, in his own terms, to his own individual faith. No further explanation need be asked for by the reader from a writer who ingenuously declares that he professes, as his Belief, the several articles of the Nicene Creed.

Do we hesitate to surrender ourselves to a Belief, including, as this Creed does—conceptions which the finite reason labours in vain to apprehend? Yet before we draw back, we should look at the alternative: we must either commend ourselves devoutly and joyfully to a Bright Infinitude, or else must wander for ever among schemes of Philosophy, or speculative theisms, to none of which, hitherto, has this same Reason, with all its efforts, succeeded in giving a tolerable degree of coherence.

At this point I challenge those whose pursuits may have qualified them to accept such a challenge, to look back upon the field of thought over which the human mind has been travelling these eighteen centuries.—There are two roads under the eye in such a retrospect: that, namely, of Abstract Thought, on the one hand, and that of Christian Belief, on the other. To the first of these I have just now adverted, and shall not repeat

what I have said, otherwise than to express, in a varied form, a profound conviction—and it is a painful conclusion to come to—that, however abundant may be the means apparently available for constructing a Theistic Doctrine, and however irresistibly conclusive the argument may be, in a logical sense, on this ground, yet, if we deduct from it, as we ought, all the materials that have been drawn, directly or indirectly, from the Hebrew and Christian canonical books, we then find ourselves in an undefended position as toward the darkest of those surmises which take their rise from that spectacle of misery and disorder which the human family has everywhere, and has always, presented. On *this* road, was not the Terminus reached long ago? If it were required of us 'to report progress' in the department of Abstract Philosophy, let it be said whether those who profess to shake off every restraint of theological bias and religious prejudice, have at length reached a position which is so solidly based, or so well defined, as that it may boast the adherence of all well-informed persons. If there be any such Philosophy which is now available as a resting-place for the human mind, it must be easy to name it: no such Philosophy can be named; and until it shall appear, nothing stands in front of us—on the road of Abstract Thought—nothing but an abyss which has become more terrible in prospect at this time than heretofore it was, because the enhanced sensitiveness of all minds impels us to people the dark void with ghastly forms. Psychological Science (or those dim conjectures that are its precursors) is robbing us of the Atheistic illusion that 'Death is an

eternal sleep.' Whether or not the *Christian* immortality be in prospect, there *is* an after stage for man; and who shall say what may be its conditions? Why may not that future be such as the analogy of things around us would suggest?

The intuitions of human nature impel us to seek relief from these distracting speculations in a theology of some sort, and which, if only because it is more distinct, shall be less appalling than are the fathomless surmises of a Pantheistic hypothesis.

We pass over then to the road of Christian Theology, or that line of dogmatic belief which professedly has been derived from the canonical books. But among these beliefs, such as they stand before us on the pages of Church history, which is it that we shall choose?

I think it will be granted that the tenour of religious history—looking now to the speculative (not the ecclesiastical) side—is of this sort:—There has been going on, throughout these eighteen centuries, an ever-renewed endeavour, on the part of—often—earnest minds, to make good a position somewhere short of that Belief to which the Nicene Creed gives formal expression. It could not have happened otherwise than that such endeavours should be perseveringly made, and that the failure of one of them should suggest and prompt to the making of another. The restless curiosity of the human mind, its impatience of restraint, and the diverse structure of individual minds, necessitate these perennial enterprises, the purpose of all of which is to win a resting-place for thought where the things it converses with are measurable, apprehensible, and subject to its

own control. The history of these fruitless enterprises, if it could be candidly written—if it could be written otherwise than as under the polemic title, 'A History of Heresies, and of Heretics,' would supply the best sort of corroborative evidence in support of Orthodoxy; inasmuch as they would all indicate their rise in the same error of attempting to generalize where the subject stands alone, and can have no parallel.

But now, in looking back upon this road—a battle-field as it is—let us ask which of these heresies (for convenience I here so call them) can now be spoken of as if it were a successful solution of the difficulties it professes to deal with? which of them is it, from the apostolic age to this, that has been accepted by Bible-reading communities as proven? which of them is it that, by fair means of interpretation, has put itself in harmony with the Text of the apostolic writings? If I could divest myself, at this moment, of every residue of religious solicitude, and could, in that mood of indifference, sit down to review the heretical series, I should be compelled to grant—concerning each of them in its turn, that its elements are incoherent, that its argumentative style is tortuous and sophistical, that its method of biblical interpretation is a system of shifts, that in surrendering oneself to it, as a scheme one might accept and rest in, one is driven to wish that it could fairly divorce itself, either from its philosophy on the one side, or from its professed regard to Scriptural authority on the other; for, if it be a philosophy, it is burdened with the Bible; and if it be a biblical theology, it is spoiled by its philosophy.

Not one of those schemes of Belief which, in the lapse of time, has disputed the ground with the Nicene Faith, recommends itself by that charm of Interior Congruity which this latter so conspicuously possesses. It is this alone that is an Entire Belief, and concerning which it may be affirmed that its elements—abstract, moral, and spiritual, are in unison. In this Belief there is proportion, and symmetry, and there is that grandeur and simplicity which is the inimitable characteristic of a Great Truth in any department. With this Belief at my heart, the logical ground of the historic evidences is firm to the foot: without it, while attempting to give coherence to the body of proof, I tread a shifting sand-bank. Without it, the supernatural narratives of the Gospels stand out unsustained, and they are so disproportioned to the doctrine that I am fain to rid myself of them, if possible: with it, the miracles of Christ's public life take their places of fitness as the graceful accompaniments of the ministry of Him who 'dwelt among us' for effecting a purpose far greater than all miracles, and more arduous than the uttering the creative fiat.

Although I can grasp no one element of my Creed, either meditatively or scientifically, for each is a property of the Infinite, yet, in the meditative contemplation of it as a whole, I am at rest; for the object before me contradicts no intuition of my moral nature. The contour is that of Majesty—the PERSON gives contentment to the highest conceptions I can form, both of perfect humanity, and of Divine benignity and wisdom.

Then, as this Catholic Belief is entire in itself, and as it fully realizes whatever is true in human nature, and whatever we may conceive of as proper to the Divine nature, so does it interpret itself into the language of my own spiritual life with a happy and a healthgiving facility. Those emotions which it finds in me dormant, and which it wakes up in me, I cannot but yield myself to, and gladly obey, when once they are thus quickened.

In an hour of perplexity and dismay—such as are incident to every human spirit that is not lost in sensualities, or wholly occupied with sordid aims—in such an hour, when the atmosphere of hopeless woe is that in which one can breathe the freest—at such a time, if I ask, and ask it as if no bright answer could be returned to such a question—What that eternal life might be of which, such as I am, I could be the recipient, and which it would be possible for *me* to enjoy, or even to wish for—I find no answer other than that which I find in my Creed. This life of the soul—the life eternal, is not what I am either fit for, or could think of with comfort; but it is such as it is fitting for HIM to bestow who is what my Creed declares Him to be. If, in seasons of saddened thought, if, amid inveterate hesitations and perplexities and misgivings, I take up the several rudiments of my now actual condition, moral and spiritual—if I know myself to be—as indeed I am—disordered, broken, powerless, faulty, and utterly wanting in any quality or talent out of which I might perchance work the price of my redemption from this state, or might perchance draw toward me the eye of Infinite Compassion—if I feel and know such things as these, and if,

while so feeling, I form to myself some notion of immortality—even of an endless consciousness, with all the odds of infinity against me, and thus ill provided for;—thus thinking in a way which I am forced to admit is according to a true estimate of myself, then do I shrink back from a boundless prospect of golden bliss, and ask rather that there may be assigned to me, as heaven's best boon, the dimmest corner of the universe, wherein to lie forgotten, and wherein to while away the cycles of an obscure eternity.

Thus dismayed—thus uncomforted, thus tempted to envy the natures around me that are not immortal, if then, by help given me from above, I look upward, if I look Sunward, if I turn to my Belief, and accept it such as it appears—a Truth, heaven-descended, then the darkness of my soul is dispelled by that Light. That immortality which, when regarded from a point of view proper to myself, is inconceivable; or, if conceivable, is undesirable, comes now to be contemplated in its own light—it is life-endless in Him, and it is His royal gift, who is the Light of Light, and the life of immortality;—it is the gift of Him in whom the perfections of the finite, and the attributes of the Infinite are so blended that a boundless and a bright hope comes to its rest upon those unchangeable attributes, thus brought within our reach by these human perfections.

This eternal life, which is offered to me in the Gospel—the Gospel being interpreted as it is in my Creed, and therefore not to be thought of as if it were a superfluous announcement of known moralities, but as a revelation

of Truths that are quite unattainable by reason—is of universal aptitude, in relation to human nature in its actual condition; and it must be so thought of even although in fact it were but one in millions that should accept it. Christianity is not a religion for the religious; but a religion for man. I do not accept it because my temperament so disposes me, and because it meets my individual mood of mind, or suits my tastes. I accept it as it is adapted to that moral condition in respect of which there is no difference of importance between me and the man I may next encounter on my path.

There is a constant tendency in minds of a certain order—which delight in first-glance generalizations—to assume the contrary of what I here affirm, and to think themselves very wise in professing the hypothesis that the Christian, if he be not a hypocrite—if he be a sincere and devout man, is such by individual organization —by temperament. It is not so: those who thus think want discrimination; and they want also an acquaintance with facts of this class. Philosophers who so speak are—smart spirits it may be—but such as show that they have little sympathy with that which is profound in human nature; and as to their own souls, there is not depth enough in them for any affection that roots itself below the surface.

In affirming this, I shall not be contradicted by those whose large experience among 'the religious,' through a long course of ministerial labour, qualifies them to give evidence on such a question. Grant it that, if you draw at hazard from out of a religious community, a hundred persons whose habits are devotional, and whose

course of life consists with their profession, this selection will *include* those whom one might in a sense call the 'devout born:'—by this phrase I intend to designate persons whose temperament, intellectual and emotional, whose sensibilities, and whose tastes, are all of the kind that favours the happiest development of the religious affections. There may be four or five such in any hundred;—rarely so many as ten or twenty. But within the limits of the same hundred there will be found (and yet they shall be unfeignedly religious persons) more than a ten or twenty whose piety has had no aid whatever from what it has found in them—has met with nothing congenial in the tone of the sentiments, in the imaginative, or in the reasoning faculty. We have seen and well known some of this order, and have been near enough to them, for a length of time, to look into their common-made souls—to see through their honest but homely hearts. We have seen, admired, and loved such, and have been cordially at one with them, and have wished to be like them—yet, if you could abstract from them all that Christian piety has done for them, in giving them intelligence, in giving them taste, and a sense of propriety, in shedding a healthy warmth through the social affections—yes, and in quickening within them a consciousness of the sublime and the beautiful—such they were that, if stripped of the heavenly enrichment they have received, they would, in most of these aspects, have been as the dead, the deaf, the blind, the idiotic; so marked were they by nature with the not-to-be-mistaken stamp of mediocrity, that an hour in their society would have been a weariness. But they have become what

now they are, because the 'Eternal life' has made its commencements in their hearts; and because, in daily earnest exercises of the soul, they have held communion with HIM who is—what my Creed declares Him to be.

Those whom the Saviour Christ—the Good Shepherd, gathers about Him from out of each generation of men, as it passes forward in time, and who, at no time, are more than a 'little flock,' are so chosen as if designedly in contradiction of any rule of obvious or natural causation; and so as to illustrate at once the sovereignty of the choice—to display the omnipotence that gives effect to it, and to demonstrate a deep truth—namely—the universal applicability of this salvation to human nature. Christ's followers are indeed exceptional, if we reckon them by arithmetic: but they are not exceptional, psychologically.

Christ's true followers, in every age, are, we say, not a class of persons who might be pointed out before they become such:—they are not believers of the Gospel by idiosyncracy;—but they are so simply because they have come to know the truth of their condition, as toward God—which is the condition of all men alike—whether they know it or not. Need it be shown that they are not the class of Mystics? Mysticism is the religion of abstraction; but Christianity is religion in the concrete:—the two mental conditions are antagonistic. Mysticism is intellectual voluptuousness, and it must therefore be abhorrent to a system, the first precept of which forbids self-seeking, and every seclusive personal indulgence. Or need it be shown that Christ's own followers are not the few of any ecclesiastical enclosure,

any more than they are the adherents and the defenders of sectarian doctrines?

Nothing so catholic as is that spiritual life into the composition of which there enters these rudiments—a consciousness of guilt and helplessness, for one part, and a correlative intuition of grace and help in God, for the other part. And if there be these rudiments, the Giver of so much grace will doubtless give more in due season.

How comforting is it to meet, on one's path, with one whose spiritual life is just rudimental in this sense; for if there be one such, there may be thousands whose names do not appear in any muster-roll of the visible Church. It is not true that Doctrine is of little account in the spiritual life; but it is true that souls may live—may live on till they wake up in immortality, with less of doctrine worded in a creed than human language could know how to attenuate.

Christ's true disciple is one who—at any moment—at a call—at a beckon, will rise from the couch and table of worldly enjoyment, and follow Him through whatever rugged way it is that his Guide is going. In any company of persons who have entered their names in ecclesiastical lists—let the word—the whisper be heard—'The Master is come and calleth for thee,' and those, among them for whom the summons is intended—rise at the instant—rise, trembling perhaps and doubting, but yet they do rise, and they go 'whithersoever He goeth.'

That such there are, and more than a very few, in each following generation, is a fact forcing itself upon

the convictions of every thoughtful and ingenuous reader of the history of Christianity;—forcing itself upon the convictions of every thoughtful and ingenuous observer of Christian communities as they now are.

These facts, which I assume to be patent and unquestionable, will receive a theological interpretation such as may best accord with the doctrinal system which we individually adhere to, and which we allow to overrule, or to dispose of all facts, in its own manner. It may be that this interpretation is nipped in between imaginary logical necessities; or it may be that it is ample, ingenuous, unencumbered. Yet either way, not an iota is added to, or is taken away from the simple reality with which we have to do—namely, that Christ's true followers are—as He said they should be—a few among those whom visible Christianity embraces, and upon whom it confers temporal blessings.

This reality, stripped of what is incidental to a Christian profession, and of what is merely conventional also, and of what may be ambiguous, reduces itself to an elementary moral and religious state of mind, which is variously described by the apostolic writers, but yet always so as to embrace the ruling idea of an intimate conscious relationship between the human spirit and the Divine Nature, as this Divine Nature is brought within the range of human conceptions and of human emotions in the Person of Christ. It behoves every one who becomes alive to his welfare in the future life, to ascertain for himself the fact of this relationship, as subsisting or not. As to others—and as to all around him who take to themselves the Christian name, it is

the part of charity to accept every such profession as valid and genuine which does not receive a glaring contradiction in the life and temper of the individual.

We have nothing here to do with the limits and the conditions of this 'Charity that believeth all things.' I am now thinking of the Christian scheme as the source of spiritual life to the individual human spirit. Now if a hundred such instances could be laid open, it would, I think, be found that, for one that believes the Gospel on grounds of historical evidence, or who believes it because it has been logically proved to be true, ninety-nine accept it, with a perfect assurance, on the strength of that sense of congruity which itself brings home, as well to the heart as to the reason, whenever it is apprehended by both in conjunction. But it is manifest that this species of intuitive conviction is not of a sort that can be brought within the range of language, for the purpose of conveying it, verbally, from one mind to another. This certitude can no more be defined or described, than can any primary element of our consciousness be so treated.

Least of all can that which may be called the *very element* among the several elements of the divine life be verbally set forth, or be brought to submit itself to the process of development in a string of propositions. This rudiment of the spiritual life is a consciousness, more or less clear, of the ABSOLUTELY GOOD, and which, to the human spirit, in its now actual condition, involves a correlative consciousness—painful and humbling—of moral disorder. How can such an awakening

as this be passed through without anguish—without some intensity of suffering? Any such agony of the soul, endured at the moment of the dispersion of the dreams of self-love, must indeed vary, as to its intensity, very greatly, according to the structure of the individual mind, and according also to its previous history, and to its experiences; yet may we surely take this as an axiom—That where there has been *no* agony in the moral nature, there has been no spiritual birth.

Whence then comes this sense of congruity which I have once and again spoken of, and which brings with it a ready assent to the FIRST TRUTH of the Christian scheme—the ineffable union of the Divine and human nature in the Person of Christ? Certainly I shall not here attempt to spread out in a paragraph, or to put into a string of sentences, that which, as it so soon transcends the meditative faculty to grasp it, so much sooner baffles a writer's faculty of embodying his thoughts in forms of speech. Yet if an explanation be sought for of the fact that, with very rare exceptions, Christian people, whose depth and seriousness of feeling indicates itself in an unambiguous manner, do cordially accept the articles of an Orthodox Creed, the explanation is discoverable at this rudimental point. The leading article in that Creed meets the awakened and wounded human spirit, and it so calms the perturbations of the soul—it so satisfies its alarms, and so brings it to its resting-place, as that the textual evidence, when adduced in detail, is listened to with comfort, and is assented to with a spontaneous confidence.

Let it be argued, as easily it may—and very learnedly

—on grounds metaphysical, and on grounds ethical, that the Christian doctrine of PROPITIATION for sin (stated without reserve) is 'absurd'—and that it is 'impossible' —and that it is 'immoral'—and that it is everything that ought to be reprobated, and to be met with an indignant rejection;—let all such things be said, as they have been said a thousand times, and will continue to be said to the world's end—it will to the world's end also be true that each human spirit, when awakened toward God, and when it has a consciousness of the Moral Attributes, finds rest in that same doctrine of the vicarious sufferings of the Divine Person, and finds no rest until it is *there* found.

I have just above affirmed that not one of those endeavours which have been made in the course of centuries to establish a doctrine of lower import than the Nicene, has had any permanent success; and the obvious reason of this failure, in each instance, may be found in its want of accordance with the canonical standard. But a more occult meaning of these successive shipwreckings of heretical enterprises is to be sought for among those laws of the human mind which forbid its resting short of an intimate sense of congruity among the principles that are offered to its acceptance. The promulgators of such schemes, themselves, find no repose in them; for they are morally incoherent. Souls alive toward God can only pine and languish, and look from side to side, until they find HIM, as the object of their trust, whom they thenceforward worship as 'God their Saviour.' Do you ask me to bring forward irresistible proof that Christianity is from Heaven? I can

do this to such an extent as that you will fail, by any fair means, to overthrow my argument. But there is a shorter course. Come with me now into the presence of the Infinite Rectitude and Purity:—when there, renounce not that true dignity of human nature in virtue of which you are *capable* of such an introduction, and which makes you rightfully amenable to this bar:—while standing confronted with Eternal Justice—learn what you are, and frankly acknowledge what is simply true; and it is then that argumentation will seem to you a superfluous labour, and that the 'historic evidences' will be superseded by the powerful workings of the soul upon its own troubled consciousness.

In every instance in which Christianity comes to be assented to and accepted on *this* ground—the ground of its meeting the requirements, and assuaging the anguish of a quickened spiritual consciousness, then the miracles of the Evangelic history at once shift their position, as toward the reasoning faculty. Heretofore they were thought of (if real) as so many proofs of Christ's mission, as a teacher sent from God; and the one question, if any question at all were asked, was this—Can we be *sure* that the record is not fallacious? But from the moment when the human spirit has coälesced with the Principal Truth of the Christian system, then this series of miracles takes its subordinate place, alongside of the course of the Divine Deliverer while he trod the earth. How can we imagine otherwise than that, at any moment while on his way toward the spot where he was to expiate the sins of the human family, he should show his command of nature, and of life,

and should do this with a freedom and a copiousness becoming those attributes that were shrouded in his Person?

It was undoubtedly under this aspect that the writers of the canonical Epistles were accustomed to think of the supernatural adjuncts of the Religion which they taught. To these attestations of their ministry, as from God, they appealed on special occasions only; but then it was in a manner which forbids the attempt to dislodge them from their place in the system, or to treat them as the illusions of weak minds. Yet while to these facts they make none but incidental and infrequent references, they were earnestly intent, first, upon the diffusion of the Gospel Message, and then upon its influence in governing the life and temper of those who received it. No moment of their precious time do they consume in the endeavour to show that Christ's miracles, and that their own, were real;—no solicitude do they betray on that ground.—What they feared was, on the one hand, lest men should reject this Gospel; or, on the other, lest, professedly accepting it, they should in conduct and temper deny it.

To the right-minded Christian of this present time the Evangelic miracles are not the props of a tottering belief; but they are the food of happy meditation. He peruses so often, and with unsatiated pleasure, these narratives, not that he may, by these means, repair the dilapidations which his faith sustains in the open world; but that, by their aid, he may bring, daily, within the range of his conceptions, the conditions of that future world wherein the distinction between the natural and

the supernatural—arbitrary as it is—shall have vanished, and where a perpetual nearness to Omnipotence shall kindle and shall keep alive the feeling that all things natural are always in truth supernatural. There can be no miracles in a world where the unclouded blaze of Eternal Power which fills all space, is visibly in act, every moment. The difference between the natural and the supernatural is relative, not absolute—it is not essential. We so account of events of this kind according to the position in which at any moment we happen to stand toward them. Grant me so much as this, that the miracles recorded in the Gospels—the feeding the multitudes—the healing the sick—the giving sight to the blind—the raising the dead, were looked at, not only by mortal, but by immortal eyes;—grant it that, while the rude multitude pressed around Jesus of Nazareth, and were filled with wonder, and said 'We have seen strange things to-day'—there was a throng supernal—looking on also. But to these the very same acts of benign omnipotence wore the tranquil aspect of a familiar experience: with them wonder can have no place, for it is absorbed in adoration. These miracles—so we on earth must call them, and which we are accustomed to speak of as inroads upon the course of nature, are, if truly considered, so many fragmentary instances of the Eternal Order of an upper world.

It is often alleged that the miracles of a remote age (even granting them to have been real) can be of no avail to us, at this time, and especially in this our advanced condition as to intellectual culture. Assuredly they are of no avail, and can be of none, to those who

regard Christianity as an inexplicable anomaly, attaching to the history of that anomalous race—the descendants of Abraham.

Let us take the centre miracle of the Christian system—the Resurrection of Christ, and see what is its bearing upon the mind and heart—upon the intellectual and religious well-being of one who accepts the Gospel as the groundwork of his spiritual life—as the reason of every fear, and of every hope, which he allows to sway his conduct.

The Resurrection of Christ is the very life of that inner life—of that initial immortality which is bestowed upon those who, in every age, 'hear His voice' and 'follow Him.' These hear Him say, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.'—'I am the resurrection and the life.'—'If any man hear my voice, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'

Now we may follow the process which takes place in the instance of one with whom the reasoning faculty is sound, and has received a due culture—who is informed on matters of religious history and criticism; and we suppose that his moral history and present condition are not such as to breed an instinctive wish to rid himself of his belief: on the contrary, his best feelings impel him to wish that he may find indubitable warrant for it. Grant it, that this Christian persuasion has not been acquired in a strictly logical order; for he has come into the possession of it by education—by devotional habitudes, and by the involuntary intuition of his moral nature. But at a certain moment in his course he makes a pause, and, in that mood of firm

resolve which is characteristic of a strong intellect and a strong will, he determines to convince himself that his faith is solidly based upon what should be its proper evidence;—or if he cannot do this—he is prepared boldly to renounce it.

For the sake of convenience, and to avoid circumlocutions, I throw this descriptive analysis of the process of a recovered belief into the form of a personal narrative. Thus resolved then, as I have said, I set out on my road, taking with me this unquestionable preliminary —namely—That, if a religious persuasion is to come into its place among those principles of action which, on *any* supposition, must govern the active and moral life, if it is to sway me, notwithstanding many impulses and motives which might prevail with me in a contrary direction—if my religion (be it what it may) is to work in and along with the mechanism of the world of mind—such as I find it to be, if so, then the confidence I may feel in its truth must, of necessity, rest upon such ground as that an opposite belief, or an absolute rejection of it, may yet be *possible*. If I am to become a religious man, in the Christian sense, then it must be at least conceivable that I might become an irreligious man, in that same sense. If a religious belief is to be the same thing with me as my moral beliefs; if it is to act as an influence countervailing other influences, then it must be *possible* for me to disbelieve. There could not be a Christian, in a world constituted as this is, if there were not always room for a man to be an Infidel.

Christianity and Philosophic Theism occupy precisely

the same ground, considered under this aspect. If in this world of discipline—this world of educational antagonism—this world of products wrought out of contrarieties—if I am to possess a faith in God, as my Creator, Judge, and Father, this faith must be the correlate of its logical opposite—Atheism. The Theist, in this present world, will never cease to find himself face to face with the Atheist. Wherein then consists the blame-worthiness of the Atheist? it is this, that knowing—and he cannot be ignorant of a truth so obvious—that the system of motives to which he conforms himself every day in the open world, always leaves room for some exception or evasion, he snatches at that exception, and he uses that evasion whenever the Theistic evidence presents itself before him; but he does not do so in any other instance, unless indeed he be fool or knave. The virtuous man is one who manfully holds to the rule, and spurns the exception, and who scorns to escape by the evasion: he embraces the principle, and he casts from him the sophism; he adheres to intuitions; he does not listen to the paradox.

This premised, I go to work at the beginning of the Christian evidences, and ask—as it concerns my own prospect of immortality—whether those things are sure, that are taught and affirmed in the Apostolic writings. It may be that I should have chosen some other medium of evidence, touching a point of such incalculable moment. But whether I choose it or not, I find myself handed over to this peculiar species of proof. Yet in looking into it—on the supposition that God, the Father of my spirit—challenges me to accept it, I find

that, as to its completeness, *in its own kind*, and as to its conclusiveness, the body of critical evidence very far surpasses any other instance with which it ought to be brought into comparison. That this is the fact has become manifest, inasmuch as the strenuous endeavours of many accomplished men, inflamed with the ambition to overthrow Christianity, have confessedly broken down. After reading what has been written with this view, I find that I can in no way disengage myself from the Christian evidence, except by resolving to dismiss the subject from my thoughts. But I go on to sift this evidence, at intervals, and I do so with all possible care, and in different moods of mind, and I come ever and again to the same result. I read the recent antichristian literature, and in doing so candour is sorely tried if I persist in supposing that educated men may be honest when they put forth what is so frivolous, is so captious, is so nugatory, as that which they advance in behalf of their disbelief. . I converse with those who profess this disbelief, and instead of rigid argumentation—serious in its tone, and ingenuous—I am met by a style of reasoning which is unanswerable only because it is vague, misty, evasive, and sentimental; and often it is rancorous.

This is enough:—I see that before I could stand clear of Christianity, I must let go my hold of those convictions which rule my every-day life. To me, Disbelief must act as a solvent of all logical coherence, and must discharge from my mind every persuasion which binds me to the social system now, as well as those which connect me with immortality.

I return then with assurance to my Belief, and I surrender myself without fear to that train of meditation which attends, and surrounds, its centre fact—the resurrection of Christ.—

—At this point, in an instance the most signal and the freest from ambiguity, the Supernatural takes a bearing upon my individual state of mind, and touches my fears, my hopes, and my conscience, and gives a turn to the emotions, excites the imagination, and occupies the reason. That Jesus Christ 'suffered, and died, and that He rose again,' is a fact in yielding myself cordially to the belief of which I pass forward from one condition of existence, and come into another; and this change is so extensive in its consequences, that nothing affecting my happiness can remain unaffected by it. That remote event with which I stand connected through the medium of historic and critical evidence, concerns me far more intimately than could any event of to-day which should entirely change my individual or social position.

What those changes are, severally, of which a belief in Christ's resurrection is the efficient cause, I shall not here attempt to specify. I will speak only of two of them; and of these, not in the style of a digested and consecutive discourse, but discursively.—

—In the first place then, an unhesitating belief of the resurrection of Christ—if I allow the meditative faculty to dwell upon it—leads me forth from a region of interminable surmises that are comfortless, or appalling, or worse; and it brings me upon a ground that is firm to the foot, and where those objects that are already familiar to me, stand out distinctly, and are sharply

defined; and they show themselves, not in the glimmer or in the blaze of a vague phosphorescence, but in the every-day sober sunlight of this present world. If I carry myself back, as I may easily do, to that Garden under the walls of Jerusalem wherein was a sepulchre, or enter an upper chamber, within the city, or go on to a house that was a sabbath-day's journey south of it; or travel so far as to the shore of the lake of Galilee; if I go thither taking with me no haze of exaggeration, I there find HIM who is at once the Representative of the human family, and its Sponsor; and I find Him such—after the suffering of death, as He was before it—save his recent scars. This immortality, therefore, which is held before me in the Christian scheme, is no such thing as a nucleus of conscious mist, floating about in a golden fog, amid millions of the same purposeless, limbless sparks. Instead of any such lifeless life, it is an immortality of organized material energies;—it is the same welded mind-and-matter human nature—fitted for service—apt for labour, and capable of all those experiences, and furnished for all those enterprises, and armed for those endurances which, seeing that they are thus provided for, and are, as one may say, thus foreshown in the Christian resurrection, put before me a rational solution—hypothetic indeed, and yet not illusory—of those now immanent trials, of those hard experiences, of those frustrated labours, and of those fiery sufferings, the passing through which so much perplexes and disheartens me now; but which at once find their reason when I see them in their ulterior intention, as

the schooling for an immortality in the endless fortunes of which this mind-and-matter structure shall have room to show what things it can do, and what it can bear, and what dangerous enterprises of love it shall devise, and shall bring to a happy consummation—it may be, cycles of centuries hence.

'The Lord is risen indeed!' said those simple souls, one to another, in that dim morning hour—which was the morning of an Eternal Day to human nature; and He so rises as to throw forward upon the path of this human nature, to the remotest range of an endless existence, the steady light of a reality we may think of reasonably.

Over against this conceivable CHRISTIAN IDEA of the future life, such as it is set before me in the instance of the Resurrection of Christ, I will put the dreamy Elysium of classical antiquity—I will put the sensualisms of the oriental beliefs—I will put the wearisome and vapid inanities of modern poetical or philosophical surmises:—yes, and over against this genuine belief I must put those more consistent suppositions which, at this present time, are presenting themselves, in a whisper, as probable, if we are to follow the guidance of psychological speculation, and if we are looking to such a future existence as the analogy of things around us might suggest. As compared with any such anticipations—more or less consonant as they may severally be with facts known to us—I find that my Christian Belief is more consistent than any one of them, and it is more realizable—and it is more cheering, more animating,

and that it is of a tendency (when rightly considered) the most healthful, as to the moral and the intellectual faculties.

And 'why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?' Every pretext for so thinking, on scientific grounds, has been snatched from us by the modern Geology. On the contrary, the supposition that man, such as he is—his intellect and his moral nature considered—should cease to exist at death, is indeed incredible; and yet, if we feel that it is his destiny to live anew, then, among all the beliefs to which the instincts of our nature have given birth, whether in ancient or in modern times, the Christian belief of the resurrection of the body, by which we must mean—the reconstruction of human nature entire—mind and matter—body and soul, is incomparably the easiest to conceive of; as it is also the best recommended by analogies; and, I will boldly say, it is the belief to which a genuine philosophy would instantly give the preference, if, among the many hypotheses of a future stage of human existence which have been imagined as probable, we must make a choice.

Yet it is on no such ground of its abstract credibility that this fundamental fact of the Christian life is accepted by those in whom that life has indeed had its commencement. As to those of them who are informed and intelligent, they can at all times fall back upon that body of evidence which secures them against inroads of disbelief. But going far beyond any such merely intellectual persuasion, Christ's true disciples have a sense

of the import of His resurrection which renders them—except as towards others—indifferent to logical methods of proof. Ask them for a reason of their faith, and they can well meet the challenge; but having done so, they retire to a ground of consciousness concerning which no distinct conveyance can be made from mind to mind, through the medium of language. Verbal propositions do not represent those intuitions within the circle of which this conviction takes place.

It can be of no avail for you to say that the supernatural, even if granted to be real, is a remote fact which can have no bearing upon our individual feelings at this time. I can never think so while I believe that Christ's resurrection, apart from the meaning which it carries as to the futurity of all men, is the proof—as it is the consequence, of the efficacy of His vicarious death in securing for us, individually, the remission of sins, and the blessedness of that future life.

It is at this point that we touch the real matter in debate among the various theological controversies of the present time. If this point be determined, then the several articles of religious belief must follow, in their order, with little question. But while this is undetermined, no argumentation will avail to bring such controversies to a conclusion.

What interpretation is it which we allow ourselves to put upon the admitted fact of the disordered condition of human nature? Is wrong right—seen under another aspect, or from a loftier point of view? Are crimes not crimes, but misfortunes? Is sin a mistake? The answer we give to questions of this kind—and they may be in-

definitely varied—involves the whole argument concerning the truth of the Christian system. The Christian may well leave the Atheist, the Pantheist, the antichristian Theist, and the would-be Christian philosophist, to make up a reply among themselves—and there can be no substantial difference among them: for himself he has come to his own conclusion in this matter. He perfectly understands—what it might have been supposed all must understand—that, to confer with, and to treat man as a machine, or as a brute, or to condole with him as more 'unlucky' than culpable, is to vilify and degrade him still more, and to consign him to a series of hopeless descents, until, in fact, he has become a brute, and might well wish himself a machine. The Christian feels that—cost what it may to the individual—the true method of treatment with human nature—the only *hopeful* course, and that which indeed lifts him up, and does him honour, is to assume that he is in fact amenable to the severest law, and should measure himself by the highest standard of purity, rectitude, and goodness, which his faculties, intellectual and moral, enable him to conceive of, or to comprehend. In truth, we need no other evidence in support of the principle that man is actually amenable to such a law, than this—That, when it is placed before him, he involuntarily recognises it as good.

The spiritual life then, or the first stage of the eternal life, is a recognition of the immutable Law of purity, rectitude, and love, not merely as abstractedly good; but as good and fit to be applied to man, how disastrous soever may be the consequences of that application to

him in his actual condition. Better were it for him to be condemned by *such* a law, than to find himself villanously discharged from court on the ground that his nature does not admit of the application of a rule so high. Better for him that he should be condemned as guilty, than that he should be vilified as pitiable. Better for man to endure his doom among beings who have fallen from heaven, than that he should take his place as the 'most unfortunate' of the mammals.

It is manifest that when the individual man has reached this point, and has unfeignedly assented to a principle of government to which he is obnoxious, the depth and intensity of the emotions that thence take their rise will bear proportion, much rather to the culture, the refinement, and the sensitiveness of his moral constitution, than to the extent or enormity of his actual transgressions. So it is (as must seem likely) that those whose course of life has been—in the world's eye—blameless, and whose domestic phase is altogether lovely, often go far beyond the ostensibly guilty in those feelings of anguish and abasement which attend their entrance upon the Christian life. Shall we say that such feelings—such agonies, are misplaced—that they are groundless—are morbid? We may say this if we wish to mark and notify our own low place on the scale of spiritual perception.

It is, then, as starting from *this* point that the several elements of a Christian belief take their order of sequence. It is as occupying this ground—the ground at once of humiliation and of hope, that the Christian accepts the articles of his Creed—each of them as

involved in that which precedes it. It is thus that he professes his belief in the mystery of the Trinity—the Incarnation, and the propitiatory sufferings and death of Christ; and it is thus, and it is as thus standing in hope of life eternal, that he welcomes the assurance of the triumphant resurrection of his Saviour, who 'having died for our sins, rose again for our Justification.'

To many, whose religious feelings are superficial, and whose faith is mainly conventional, the resurrection of Jesus is coolly assented to as perhaps a 'well authenticated fact,' carrying with it—of course—the truth of the Christian scheme. To Christ's true disciple his rising from the dead is of infinitely more moment than it can be as yielding any such attestation.

I affirm therefore anew the proposition with which I set out—That the SUPERNATURAL, as we find it in the Christian Scriptures, not merely vouches for the truth of the system, as a Revelation from God; but that it is the ground and reason of that hope of immortality which is the life of the soul.

THE THIRD INTENTION OF CHRIST'S MISSION, AS ATTESTED BY MIRACLES.

IN entering upon this ground it must be understood that I am not attempting to meet all objections, or even to satisfy every reasonable doubt: all I ask is, that those with whom I may suppose myself to be in converse are of serious mood; and I suppose them to admit that the Christian system, such as we find it in the books of the New Testament, rightfully commands the thoughtful regard of every well-constituted mind; and also—That, as we find in these memoirs an historical consistency, or INDIVIDUAL CONGRUITY, which is of a very peculiar kind, it must be reasonable to follow it up as a safe guidance, and to pursue this oneness of the PERSONAL IDEA as far as it will carry us; even although it may lead us in thought, beyond the boundary of this visible mundane scene.

I do not hesitate to make this demand, nor to ask the thoughtful to accompany me a few paces forward upon this dim road. What, in fact, is the initial supposition on the ground of which we consent, at all, to listen to Christ as the Teacher of things which can be authentically known by man only through the aid of a

Revelation from Heaven? Plainly it is this, that the things of the 'three score years and ten'—the things 'seen and temporal'—the things that 'perish in the using,' are far from including all that we have to do with while these seventy years are running out; or in other words, in surrendering ourselves, in any degree, to the Christian argument, we implicitly grant, that the Human Family stands related—not merely to the Creator and Ruler of all things; but to a great scheme of Universal Government, which is developing itself slowly—and in part—now, and here;—more fully hereafter, and elsewhere.

But if we grant so much as this, it necessarily follows that HE who, on entering upon this earthly platform, professes that He comes forth from a higher and a wider region of the Universal Government, and declares Himself to be conversant with, and to be perfectly informed concerning, the transactions and the persons of that higher stage of things, should, in His discourses, and still more in His acts and course of conduct, give indications of the same, which can be intelligible only on the supposition here asked for.

Such a VISITOR from a foreign world may either discourse at large concerning the things, the persons, and the transactions of that world; or He may observe a rigid reserve on every subject of that class. Christ does not take the first of these courses;—He does not freely and copiously speak concerning a supermundane system; but neither is His reserve absolute. He utters himself thereupon in a very distinct, and always in a peremptory manner; but He goes no further:—He

gives no narratives, otherwise than as parable. He relates no incidents;—He says nothing that might either tempt conjecture or stimulate curiosity. Yet it is quite certain that a recollection, on our part, of Christ's professed relationship to orders of being not of the human family, is indispensable to our completing our idea of his PERSON, as interiorly coherent and consistent. Let me again, and with emphasis, use that comprehensive word — CONGRUITY, and affirm that, whereas this majestic harmony of the moral ingredients of Christ's individual character—this fitness and symmetry, which—if we make allowance for the obliquities of a few minds—has always subdued, as it does now subdue, the minds of men, and does win their reverential affection—this perfect consistency, intellectual and moral, would be marred if we were to set off from our conception of His character this, His hypothetic relationship to orders of being that are not of this human family.

Does not that conception of Christ's demeanour and style which we gather from the four Gospels—does it not include the idea that we are in the presence of one who is acting at the impulse of a purpose deep hidden in his own bosom? Does it not seem that he has a consciousness of facts, of which the men about him are not informed? Does he not move forward as if he were bringing about ends that are remote from the proximate intention of what he says and does? Christ's acts are frequently, or they seem to be so—incidental to his principal purpose: His teachings are fragmentary, because the bearing of his doctrine is shared between

this—the visible world, and another world. His miraculous interpositions for the relief of human suffering appear to have been prompted—at the moment, merely by human impulses of compassion; but they are done as if he deflected, for the time, from his higher course in performing them. The Saviour of the world walks the earth, and He makes his way through the crowd, as one whose eye is fixed upon objects beyond its horizon.

If, in an attempted explication of Christ's language in relation to a spiritual system, we adopt the meagre hypothesis of supposing that He adapts himself, by accommodation, to the superstitious beliefs of the Jewish people of that age, what we do is not merely to abate our confidence in his sincerity as a Teacher; but we remove from the historical conception of his character a set of facts, the reality of which is indispensable to its completeness. It is then chiefly on *this* ground that I feel it to be unavoidable to understand his language, when concerned with an invisible world, as carrying a meaning that is literally true.

Assuming so much as this, then what it comes to, expressed in the fewest words, is this—That the history and destinies of the Human Family have become (if the word may be allowed) entangled with the history and the destinies of tribes or orders, partakers with it of intelligence, and moral consciousness, and liberty of will; but subject to another administrative economy, and not included in the same remedial dispensation.

The *consequences* of a belief such as this, whether imaginary or real, are nothing to me: the belief may be of

ill tendency; and I am sorry if it be so; but my sorrowing or not sorrowing will not make the facts other than they are. Can I walk about this world—can I make my way through the streets of cities—can I enter the dens that are found in some of those streets, and then persuade myself that a supposition of this kind is abstractedly, or that it is theologically incredible? Alas! this must not be said. The customary pretexts of scepticism in relation to subjects of this class belong to a period—now drawing to its close—or passed already—a period of shallow and frivolous thinking—a period when the actual condition of large portions of the human race—imperfectly known, and little thought of, and less cared for, had no appreciable influence upon systems of opinion. Theories of human nature were in the last age put together in closets, to be bandied about in saloons. But what correspondence had these scented things with that real world into the core of which our modern philanthropy has carried us, to mourn and wonder;—and to mourn the more?

A revolution has already made great progress which, in its issue, shall bring about a far more deeply-toned belief, as to the spiritual world, and as to the destinies of man, than has ever yet taken hold of the human mind: and thus it will be that, if Superstition has tyrannized the ages that are past, a quelling consciousness of awful realities shall rule the future in equal sternness.

It is Christianity itself that has given the initiative to this revolution; and it is the same that shall draw the conclusion; but it is likely that we shall be carried

through the intermediate stages of the process by the Atheism of the present time, which has the nerve to do what itself only could do. A belief in the bearing of the Christian scheme upon a wider circle than that of the human family must carry with it an admission of its supernatural attestations; and toward such an admission we are tending—the modern Atheism giving us just now a propulsive aid.

But it may be asked—Are we not receding from the field of modern intelligence, and going back to the ground of the 'dark and pernicious credulity'—which belonged to an age of ignorance? I do not ask whether the objects before me are such as an ignorant age will delight in; nor ask whether a belief concerning them be of bad influence, or otherwise. It is certain that the human mind has universally entertained suppositions of this kind; and therefore there must be a ground for them. I wish there were no ground for them; but there is; and nothing can be gained by refusing to see it. There would, in truth, be a powerful motive for ridding ourselves of the appalling idea, of a Personal Satan, and of his hosts, if, in renouncing the 'Superstition,' we could also dispel the 'darkness.' But we cannot do so; on the contrary, if we refuse to admit this article into our pneumatology, as matter of history—then the 'darkness' which shrouds the world thickens around us so much the more, and becomes indeed a 'thick darkness,' for it is then a gloom, without a gleam. So long as we retain an hypothesis which connects the history and destinies of the human race with another history and with other destinies, we retain also, in some manner,

though it be wholly undefined, a sort of hold upon the future:—for we then know that there is a course of events in progress, which may issue, we know not how, for the better. As on the one hand there can scarcely be a greater mistake than that of supposing the ancient problem of the origin of evil to be in any way solved, or the mystery in the least degree cleared up, by carrying it back to the epoch of the Satanic rebellion; yet, on the other hand, the inroad of sin and woe *upon the human family* comes to wear a different aspect when it is thought of in connection with this supposition. So thought of, it is brought into relationship with that scheme which is seen to be unfolding itself from the first page to the last of the Canonical Books. Seen from the position into which we are insensibly led by following this series of writers, the evil that is in *this* world, and its attendant miseries, fall into perspective, and exhibit, at least, so much of coherence as may result from their relation to a scheme within which truth and order reign supreme, and upon which a light, though it be only a glimmer, does shine.

Especially it is as seen from this position that the personal behaviour of Christ, and that the professed intention of His mission toward man, become intelligible; for, to think of Him merely as the Teacher of a pure morality, and as the author of beneficial secular maxims, leaves the greater part of His conduct, and of His teaching, entirely unaccounted for. To think of Him further as the Redeemer of His people, though it supplies much of what is needed to give a meaning to both—His behaviour and His teaching—

still leaves much unaccounted for, nor do we find the clue to this until we accept, in a literal sense, what is declared concerning the 'Christ of God' as HE who should drive the Usurper from the world he has invaded.

This might seem to be the point at which a writer—intending to propitiate his opponents, and to smooth a path from Disbelief to Christian Faith—would introduce some hitherto unthought-of hypothesis concerning the universality of Redemption, or the possible modes in which things future, which we find to be inconceivable, may yet be conceived of. I am not about to attempt anything of this sort. The notorious failure, hitherto, of all such endeavours, from the time of Origen to this time, might well be taken as warning enough against venturing a step on ground where there is no footing. One scheme after another has broken down—and necessarily so, because each of these mitigative theories includes much more than those will allow who, on this very account, reject Christianity; and they assume much for which a Christian man—who would fain find it—finds no warrant in the written Revelation; and if not, who is he that shall dare to add anything to that word, or to strike off from it the least particle?

The easily recognised characteristics of undigested thinking—of reasonings prompted by a predetermined issue, and which are reckless of evidence, attach, as I think, to every one of the hypotheses of universal restitution which have been advanced by men professing to respect the authority of Scripture. In the regions of Science—reasonings of the same class—the

products of the very same order of minds, come under the familiar designation of quackery:—several philosophies of this sort have lately courted notoriety. The gravity of the subject now in hand should preclude the employment of this colloquial phrase;—otherwise it would very fitly designate these spurious schemes—one and all. To a sound mind the momentary solace which attends a first listening to a scheme of this sort, there quickly succeeds a profound dissatisfaction, which leaves us in more discomfort than before.

If then we reject, as I think we must, the mitigative theories that have been devised for reconciling our notions of the Divine Benevolence, as related to the destinies of the family of man, with visible facts and with articles of our faith, what do we bring forward in the place of them for the purpose of assuaging that state of distress and perplexity toward which we are always advancing, just in proportion as we steadily think of what is around us, and look forward to the future in serious mood?

Although it be confessed that no hypothesis of this sort is in reserve which a Christian man can bring forward; nevertheless there are considerations to which a belief in the literal—or, we may say, the *historical* meaning of certain narratives in the Gospels gives risé, which are of high importance for maintaining a religious temper. They are such as these.—In the first place, the interpretation which we ought to put upon Christ's language and conduct, wherever He had to do with those who are spoken of as possessed by unclean spirits or 'demons,' carries the supposition that the

relation in which He stood toward beings of this class was essentially unlike that which He sustained toward any of the human race. This marked dissimilarity is strongly implied in various ways.—The passionate utterances of these beings (utterly unlike as they are to the ravings of maniacs) were in no case expressive either of hope or of submission: on the contrary they bespoke a well-understood and an inveterate hostility:—these convulsive exclamations, and these sudden recognitions, speak volumes of history—a history that runs far back into the cycles of duration past;—and it is a history of which there are chapters not yet enacted. On the part of Christ there is indicated nothing but a corresponding and a settled adverse feeling which has no reserves, and has no purpose of relenting.

If we go so far as this, then the inference is irresistible, that there may be, within the universal government of God, and that there is, in fact—conscious, open, and hopeless rebellion. It is true that Speculative Theism might show cause for refusing to admit a supposition so appalling as this;—but can we indeed walk the streets of this world—and still profess to think it incredible?—Alas! the fact supposed must be granted to be possible—and more than possible! But if there be, as we now say, open and determinate rebellion within the realm of God's government, and if it borders nearly upon us too—and if states of mind which resemble such a desperate perversion, are facts, attaching even to the human system, then must there be ground for a fear—a fear which the ordinary proceedings of human governments show to be reasonable—of this

sort:—When rebellion is rife in a country, it is certain that men who in many respects are worthy citizens may easily come to be fatally compromised with it, and may find themselves in the end consorted with the worst of criminals, and that they are sharers in the same fate.

Again: If facts be such as we are now supposing, then we get a means of rightly interpreting a large part of that discipline which we are undergoing in the present state. The ulterior purpose of that severe training through the stages of which some of us, if not all, are passing, and which constitutes the individual history of some men from the earliest development of reason to the last hour of life, is, as it seems, the formation of a firm principle of religious loyalty—an enduring acquiescence in the procedures of the Divine Government—a principle so fixedly wrought into the soul as that it may stand trial under conditions the most difficult that can be imagined—not only of the life now present, but of the future life. Why the entire schooling of a long life has been, to some men, what it has been, becomes so far intelligible if we admit the supposition that, in the future life, with its incalculable revolutions, such spirits, thus tried and proved as they have been, shall be challenged to undertake services in relation to which this immoveable loyalty shall find its occasions, and shall be nothing more—as to its iron nerve—than those occasions shall be found to demand.

Suppositions of such a kind as this may ill comport with the notions of many good people about Heaven—and which notions we may grant to be right in *substance* although wrong in *form*; but I think they will come to

be accepted as not unfounded in the next age, when Scriptural Interpretation shall be unshackled, and shall speak out the full meaning of the Inspired Text. Meantime I admit no element into my anticipations of the future life which I do not see to be symbolized now, in the course of the Divine administration toward individual men. In professing as we do every Sunday that we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come, I understand the 'world to come' to be such a world as that the present world shall be a fit preparation for its labours, and for its endurances, and for its trials of religious constancy.

Again: If we admit, in their obvious and properly historic sense, those of the Evangelic narratives which relate to demoniacal possessions, the Supernatural element therein implied supports an inference which, when in the fewest words, and with the utmost caution, we have enounced it, should be left to carry its meaning home into our hearts, without our attempting to follow it out into consequences—we know not what, and for which we have not *sufficient* warrant, or rather—none at all.

—The series of miracles wrought by Christ during the years of His public ministry had—as toward mankind—not only a benevolent intention, but a beneficent issue. This fact is the more to be noted, because it forms a ground of distinction between Christ's miracles and those of His ministers, as related in the Book of the Acts—several of which were administrative and punitive. But no such use was made of miraculous powers by Him who declares that He came into the

world 'not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' In striking contrast with this rule of the Supernatural, as it is seen to govern the Saviour's conduct toward men, is the rule which manifests itself as often as He encountered beings of another order, or of another derivation. In every *such* instance, the word of power carried with it—Law, not Mercy:—it was not vengeance; but it was reprehension and repulse:—the implied meaning was ever the same—'Keep your bounds—Go back.'

If it be asked—What then is your further inference? I am prepared with no answer; I have no further inference; yet there is before me a conspicuous fact—there is here a difference; there is here a distinction; and this fact, which I know not how to unfold, consists with the belief which I gather up from many scattered notices, strewn over the canonical pages, the purport of which is that the Mission of Christ—the Son of God, and Saviour of the world—was to overthrow a usurpation, and to drive the Tyrant from the field he has invaded; and I further gather this truth, that, in carrying forward this purpose, He shall not fail, but shall triumph; for it is said of Him, that 'He shall lead captivity captive.' This is my resting-place;—it is not indeed a place of sunshine; but it is as a 'covert from the storm.'

Let it not be said, or imagined, that, in adducing considerations of this sort, the intention is to solve problems, or to clear up mysteries:—we may hold it for certain that *no* considerations coming within the range of the human mind, can avail for any such pur-

pose. But what may be looked for, as the fruit of these trains of thought, is this—namely, the giving coherence and consistency to many insulated passages of Scripture; and more than this—the rendering an aid to meditation when we are endeavouring to complete our conceptions of the Saviour Christ, as the Deliverer of man. A principal element of that Idea—absolutely unique as it is, is supplied when we duly regard His ministry as it is related, on the one hand, to the victims of a usurpation; and on the other hand, to its chief and his adherents.

THE CYCLES OF CHRISTIANITY.

At this moment * a lengthened period of social tranquillity seems to have come to its end; and, as to the western and cultured races, it has been peculiarly favorable to those reactions of the public mind upon itself which are natural to it, and beneficial, in their ultimate results; but for which reactions leisure is not found in seasons of political excitement. We may be entering upon a period of arduous struggles, of great enterprises, of great trials, and of sufferings as great. A period may be before us—not for amusing ourselves with ingenious paradoxes, not for dressing up philosophic schemes of opinion; but for daring, and for doing; and for enduring, whatever energetic men may devise, achieve, and bear. The ingenious writers, therefore, who, with so much zeal, ability, and vehemence, have been labouring, of late years, to rid themselves and the world of Christianity, may find that their day is gone by—and that it must be their sons, or their grandsons, who shall return to this crusade, in some future time of repose, like the past. At this time, not only will men of action have

* Written in 1855.

no ear for subtilties; but such men will feel their need, personally, of principles that are already authenticated, and that are not now to be sought for and elaborated at home. Men of action, who may have much to suffer, as well as to do, will ask for grounds of religious hope and solace which time has consolidated, and on which the good, the wise, the great, of all ages, have been wont to rest in their hour of trial. The Christian Belief shall again, as heretofore, be found to meet the need of humanity in the years that are before us—years, not of dreams, but of realities.

As to the apostles of the modern impiety—Atheistic, and Theistic, and Pantheistic—although their enterprise has failed for the present, and their hopes dashed, they may console themselves with the thought that—if not to them, to their successors, another opportunity shall arise for labouring on the same stony field. The Christian system will itself evolve principles that necessitate these periodic struggles, and that give them force; and it will do so at each return, with augmented force.

At this time what would be more fruitful of good than any imaginable triumph over Infidelity — on the field of argument—would be a wise preparation, on the part of the Christian community, for that next coming season when the Gospel must anew pass through a crisis of great intensity. A main part of such a preparation would consist in knowing clearly whence such an intestinal conflict springs, and toward what issue it tends.

In affirming the Christian origination of the recent outburst of Infidelity and Atheism, it is needful to dis-

tinguish between those deep-seated sequences of thought which we have just now in view, and those obvious and incidental effects of patent causes which might have been other than they are, and which may or may not reappear at a future time. The fact is not to be questioned that much of the Disbelief which floats around us, and which poisons the atmosphere of towns, takes its occasion, or derives its force, from what it finds that is wrong, or absurd, or merely conventional, in the Christianity of Christian people. Materials of this sort are rife always, so that men of acrid temper are never at a loss when looking about for occasions of that scorn which they would fain heap upon the Gospel. There is a plenty of Disbelief which springs up, rank, about sacred edifices; but what we have to do with at this time is—a Spectre that rises from the Adytum.

The Atheism of this age has a depth which is its own only because it has sent its line down into that abyss of which Christianity withdraws, in part, the veil. This Atheism displays a grandeur which is not of itself; but which it assumes in looking upward, beneath the vault of that Infinitude to which it has gained admittance by help of the Gospel. This Atheism shows, and it actually possesses, a sensibility, and it has a consciousness of the true, the beautiful, and the good, which it owes, entirely, to the books and to the system which it denounces. These tones of tenderness and of purity in which it has learned to utter itself—if we catch them at a distance, so as to lose what in them is articulate—might be mistaken for the silver sounds of mercy to man, and universal benevolence.

The Atheism which startles us by the fireside, which sits with us in pews, which flames out in our literature, which is the Apollo of the periodic Press, has not merely learned its rhetoric in the Christian school, and thence stolen its phrases, but it has there got inspiration from a Theology of which itself is only the necessary antithesis. Evoke now from Hades a *genuine* Atheist of the classic Pagan Church, and bring him within hearing of a modern Atheistic lecture, and the very terms of the discourse would be unintelligible to him. You must baptize him before you can convince him that you are his disciples, or that he is indeed one of yourselves. The Creed in which *he* lived and died was a marble paradox, and you have a great work to do in him before he can be made to listen to a breathing sophistry, with its Christianized heart, and its soul of fire. An Atheistic philosophy which is indeed earthborn, and which steams up from the dead levels of the Pagan world, is a miasma, in breathing which nations are overcome with drowsiness—intellectual and moral, and walk about dreaming, for thousands of years, unchanged. But a Christian-born Atheistic philosophy comes over a Christian land, at periods, as a cloud, riding upon the winds—it mutters blasphemies—it smites the earth with its forked scourge, and it moves away.

The very same body of facts concerning the woes and disorders—hopeless as they are, and purposeless as they seem, which press upon humanity—these facts, lightly regarded by the sages of pagan antiquity, and which led them to reject the hypothesis of a Supreme wisdom, benevolence, and power—these facts come before us

now—unchanged or scarcely mitigated, and they not merely perplex the reason—they do more, they distract us, because we have been long trained in meditative converse with an Idea of the Supreme Wisdom, Benevolence, and Power, immeasurably surpassing any conception of these attributes which the ancient mind had ever entertained. That which was an insoluble problem to the ancient classic reason, is also, to the modern mind, a problem insoluble:—but it is more than an intellectual stumblingblock, for it puts at fault our consciousness of first Truths.

Moreover, while Christianity has so greatly enlarged our religious conceptions, teaching us to think so much more profoundly, and more justly as to whatever touches our higher nature, the advances of Science, which in a manner expand our consciousness over the fields of infinite space and time, help to impart an awful intensity to every subject that has any theologic aspect. Then the same Gospel which gives rise to warm emotions—dispersive of selfishness, brings in upon the heart a sympathy that tempts us to wish that itself were not true; or that it had not taught us so to feel. At these points then we come upon an interior antagonism—a deep counteractive energy, whence, almost with periodic regularity, springs—a disbelief of which Christianity is the immediate object, inasmuch as it has been its incitative cause.

During a period of national repose, such as that which we have passed through, the Christian system, its doctrines and its moral energies, working freely upon a people whose mind and speech submit to no censorship,

produces effects of two kinds—the one being the antithesis of the other. The first of these is the product of its own proper influence, which refines and enhances the humanizing sentiments of the people, in their respective classes:—so it is that many of the highest class will be seen to signalize themselves in courses of self-denying and noble philanthropy; while the lowest class, to some extent, are weaned from their rudeness and their ferocity. At the same time the large middle class becomes alive to whatever touches the well-being of mankind, near at home, and afar off, and they tax themselves heavily to give effect to many generous enterprises. In effecting these ameliorations Christianity shines with its own light, and shows its derivation from a world of love and order.

At the same time, and it is because men are at leisure, that the meditative sensitiveness of which Christianity is the source, and which it so much cherishes, evolves adverse theories, and gives birth to schemes of Christianized philosophy (first within the pale of the Church) and then of antichristian philosophy, beyond those limits. From this same source perplexed meditations spring up, in their ancient order of sequence —Pantheistic and Atheistic schemes, which might be spoken of as the Congestion of thought in minds, often of fine mould, though not the most robust. Take two men of equally humane temperament, and train both of them under Christian influences, and lead them both, day after day, through scenes of human degradation and wretchedness:—the one of them, whose structure of mind is the most ordinary, and also the most healthy,

will addict himself, forthwith, to some labour of Christian benevolence; and he finds himself, though much worn, yet happy in his path of toil. The other, who, intellectually, is the choice sample of the two, deeply ponders what he sees:—he thinks, till he becomes miserable;—he throws up his religious profession, and wildly looks round for some doctrine that may assuage his anguish:—but he finds no such doctrine, and the collapse of conflicting feelings leaves him—without God, and without hope in the world! Deprive the first of these men of his Christian belief, and of his Christian motives and hopes, and he will presently 'faint and be weary' in his work. But withdraw from the mind of the other those lofty conceptions of the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness which he received at first from Christianity, and he would quickly find himself able to turn away from scenes of human misery with frivolous indifference.

We may be sure that whenever Christianity has so far wrought itself into the mind of a people at large as to give rise to many self-denying enterprises of benevolence, and that it sustains these labours in vigour from year to year, it will also have produced a reaction—within the same community, which will utter itself concerning the evils that abound in the social system in tones, that at first are querulous—then they become ferocious, and at last they are blasphemous. If on all sides of us there are penitentiaries—reformatory prisons—missions among cannibals—and those latest efflorescences of Christian love—ragged schools—then there will also be heard lecturers and writers—some of them

men of genius, who, after beginning their career as humane reformers, end it as murky misanthropic Atheists. Just as the pains and troubles of a man's individual lot may drive him to snatch at the knife or poison of the suicide, so may the anguish and the despair with which a sensitive heart contemplates the miseries that are in the world impel him, if we might so speak, to open the veins of the immortal spirit, and to let go forth the life-blood of the soul.

This is that sifting of spirits—this is that fiery trial which, with a peculiar intensity, is going on at this time, and is putting to the severest proof the loyalty —the religious allegiance, of many, born and trained within the pale of Christian influence. To each of us, in a more or less pointed manner, the critical question is now put whether we will stand by Heaven—by Truth—by Goodness; or will range ourselves with the primæval rebellion, and be compromised with those whose quarrel with God may be older than the mountains?

This trial of constancy is now severe to many; but it may yet become more so. One need not be gifted with a prophet's eye to foresee this as probable: for it is a course of things that is involved in the present tendencies, at once of religious feeling, and of Abstract Thought.

Those who have survived (in a religious sense) a conflict of this kind, eagerly turn to the Evangelic records of Christ's discourses, that they may discover if He has made any provision—or if so, what provision, for securing the tranquillity of those who 'believe and are sure' that He is the true interpreter of God's

ways toward men. How is it that this 'Physician of souls' goes about to heal the deep wounds of those whose wounds have touched the immortal life? We cannot open the Gospels without acknowledging that the lips of this Teacher breathe love and peace—health and power, as well as wisdom. May we not therefore confidently look to Him for the relief of our perplexities —for the solving of distracting problems? Will He not shed some light upon the dark mysteries of this world? He does nothing of that sort which we so much desire! He is fixedly abstinent in relation even to subjects which the Jewish mind of that age had become in some degree alive to. He does not propound the main articles of a Theistic belief, or speak of them as if they needed to be ascertained or defended. Much less does He recognize, as if they were a burden upon that belief, the staggering difficulties which oppress us, of this age, and with which the thoughtful in all times have so vainly striven. That heavy load of troubled speculation which weighs us down, does not seem to have come into His view when He invites the weary to seek their rest in Him. This 'Man of sorrows,' who was 'acquainted with griefs,' gives no expression to *those* griefs which, to many of the thoughtful and sensitive among His followers, have outweighed the pressure of extreme personal sufferings, so that they have been tempted to say—'I am indeed afflicted—yet would endure all with cheerfulness, if the thick darkness that overspreads these heavens were withdrawn, or if only I could see a verge of the dawn upon the cloud.'

On one occasion, when a perplexity nearly of this

class stood out suddenly in His view, there is heard from His lips a singular outburst of devout exultation —'I thank Thee, O Father'—which in no way chimes in with our modern comfortless feeling. When, from the ridge of Olivet, He wept over the doomed city—its palaces and Temple, foreseen in ruins, His sorrow was of that sort which resembles the spontaneous grief of a parent who thinks of the miseries that are in store for a rebellious child:—the trouble was of the concrete, not of the abstract kind.

And yet if we do not find in the teaching of Christ that which we should so gladly find, we find at least the rudiments of peace, and a remedy against distraction, which, if we will accept it and use it, brings with it as much acquiescence as is to be had, in the nature of things, on earth;—and as much, perhaps, as is to be found even among those that have encircled the Eternal Throne since the morning hours of the Creation.

If there presents itself—and such a surmise *will* present itself, a surmise of this kind—That the terms and phrases which are employed by the Canonical writers, when they speak of the Divine attributes of Wisdom, Goodness, Love, are used, *as of necessity*, because there are none others; but that these terms must not be so understood, or be so interpreted by us, as would bring them into parallelism with our finite conceptions, or with any human modes of thinking and of feeling, and which would warrant the free outflow of our sympathies in harmony with our religious beliefs;—if we are thus tempted to think, then a suspicion so disheartening is dispelled when we consent to listen to

Christ, when He declares himself to be—not merely a messenger, sent by God to man, but far more than this—the Living Representative of the Divine Nature, so far as the Infinite Mind can become cognizable by the finite mind. Now as Representative of God among men, we hear him say—'He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father also;' and it is certain that what are called the moral attributes, are, in a much ampler sense cognizable by us than the natural attributes can be. It is not merely that Christ, authenticating His message by miracles, teaches us with authority concerning God; but He treads the earth as the genuine Image of the Invisible God;—and as such, He assures us that the Universe is one, in its moral constitution—that the language of Heaven is literally interpretable among men—word for word; and that whatever marvels might surprise us in traversing the skies, yet, as to our moral intuitions, we should everywhere find ourselves at home. The language in which we embody our notions of the True, the Right, the Good, the Loving, is not a dialect of this province; but it is the universal style of God's kingdom in all places.

Precisely therefore as we—if we be humane, are prompted to 'do good to all, even to the evil and the unthankful,' so, and with a feeling strictly analogous to this, does the Father of all dispense His benefits. In a sense corresponding to our own consciousness—HE is righteous in His administration—He is no respecter of persons—He is merciful—compassionate—slow to anger—ready to forgive—and a Hearer of prayer. But He is also firm of purpose, true to His word, and sure to give

effect to whatever originates with Himself. The Saviour Christ does not in words vindicate the ways of God to men; but better than doing this, He stands before us as a living Theodicæa—an intelligible expression of those attributes of the Divine Nature which carry with them, if not an implicit solution of the dark mysteries of the moral system, yet an antidote to the fatal effect they might have upon our minds; and this is certain, that if there be rebellion in any province of the universe, it is a resistance to such wisdom, and to such rectitude, and to such love, as are brought down to our apprehension in the Person of Christ—the Christ of God.

And yet, if by this means a Theology is set before me which commands my approval, something more is still needed to afford me the intimate satisfaction which I seek for; or at least to convey to me a uniform peace —a sentiment, as well as a conclusion of the reason. I may make progress as to my conceptions of the Divine Nature; and yet the further I go in assimilating my own state of mind to those conceptions, so much the more does darkness thicken around me when I look abroad, and when I tread the crowded thoroughfares of this world. It is true that there are considerations which, if they be wisely entertained, suffice for convincing me that those troubles and pains that affect myself have been, and are, not more than enough to constitute a beneficial discipline, which finds its sufficient reason in the wholesome products by which I am morally the gainer. But where shall I find the shadow of a reason—applicable to the millions of instances in which the miseries of this life are taking effect in no

such remedial manner; but the very contrary;—for they are the very source and cause of aggravated vice, and of deeper and deeper wretchedness?

At this point it becomes evident that, for the ground of a settled composure in looking abroad upon the human system—such as it is, and such as it ever has been, I need something more than hitherto I have found. Abstract Theism is serviceable to a certain extent; but it leaves me to contend, as I may, with formidable surmises, and to abide under the shadow of mysteries that have always defied human reason. On *this* ground the brightest lights and the darkest shadows —not blended by any diffusive medium—show the harshest contrasts. When I advance from this ground, and come upon the illuminated field of Biblical Theism, there is here indeed both light and warmth; nevertheless, as we have just seen, it is this very Theism—well defined as it is, and pure, which gives a proportionate intensity to the trouble that draws its too valid reasons from the spectacle of human nature—erring, suffering, and far from hope.

Where then shall I find peace? Shall I school myself in apathy, and resolutely refuse, any more, to care for ills which do not infringe upon my personal ease and enjoyment? I cannot do this, if I would. I dare not persuade myself to assume this insensibility, even toward the million with whom I have no tie of near relationship:—how then shall I attempt it as toward the few whose welfare is dearer to me than my own? Philosophy will not help me. Theistic theories fail me at the very point where I might look to them for comfort; nay,

they mock me at that point. The Theism of the Bible, if it be considered abstractedly, renders me tenfold more alive to perplexities of this kind than I should have been without it:—it is the very soul of that consciousness upon which the evil and the woe around me take effect so powerfully.

I see before me but one way of peace; and yet even this is not rest to the Reason, for it does not bring with it a clearing away of thick clouds; it is not the opening of a bright azure overhead; but it is the commencement of a composure which establishes itself in the heart in a spontaneous and gradual manner. Devoutly I believe that there is not in this world (and probably not in any other) more than one position in occupying which the human mind—if it be sensitive, and unselfish, and in every sense *alive*, can be exempted from those distracting perplexities which are incompatible with moral health, and which abate virtuous energy.

—Already I have listened to Christ as a Teacher sent into the world on God's part, to make known to me what I could not otherwise have known. I have learned also to regard Him as the Representative of the Moral Attributes of God, so that, in contemplation of Him I acquire, as to those attributes, a consciousness which is trustworthy, and sufficient too for my guidance and support in the exigencies of this life. It remains then that I think of, and live in communion with, the same Christ as the FAULTLESS MAN, in whose demeanour, and in whose words and actions, I find an intelligible authentication of every emotion, and of every sensibility which I ought to allow, and to cherish, as good and

reasonable, and as truly related, not only to those facts which come within my own range of vision, but to those also which lie far beyond it. In the demeanour—in the discourses—in the conduct of Christ—the TRUE and FAULTLESS MAN, I see reflected, as in a mirror, all things of all worlds that touch, or that belong to, the moral state and consciousness of the intelligent creation—that is to say—all those facts which, if I saw and knew them, would affect me with a corresponding joy or sorrow.

It must not be pretended, on the adverse side, that the Evangelic Memoirs, containing as they do the whole that we can now know of Christ, are too fragmentary—too inartificial, and too brief, to warrant my deriving from them the comprehensive PERSONAL IDEA which now I am in search of. Infinitely preferable are these fragmentary Gospels, in relation to the purpose before me, than would be any imaginable biography, framed upon a philosophic principle. In any instance where the Individual Man of a past age is to be thought of, vividly and correctly, give me genuine *fragments* of his actual life, and of his familiar converse with his chosen friends, and keep far out of my sight the generalizing portraiture which may be offered to me by some writer who is more full of himself and of his sagacity, than of his subject. This is, I think, the rule in observance of which the ablest recent writers of history have made so great an advance upon the practice of their predecessors. The Gospels, rigidly analysed on the principles that are now authenticated within the department of history, offer to

me precisely the sort of materials which are the most to be desired, in such a case.

With these materials in my hand—with these sketches —these hints—before me, I come into the possession of a conception of the Personal Christ as complete as I have of any personage of the ancient epochs. And I acquire this distinct conception notwithstanding the fact that this Person is such a one as had never before trod the earth, nor has any one the like to Him trod it since. And be it observed that this Perfect Idea which has concreted itself in my mind, is not a vague outline of godlike majesty; but it has the vivacity and the intelligible distinctness of a likeness, taken and fixed, at various moments, by some infallible and instantaneous process. All things mundane I must regard as a troubled dream—all history must become as an incoherent myth, if it be not certain that the Christ of the Gospels is a reality, and that the incidents of His life are in the strictest sense—historical.

This being so, and as I have on other grounds convinced myself that this Christ of the Gospels combines in His Person the qualities and virtues of human nature with the attributes of the Divine nature, I draw near to Him in the confidence that I shall find indicated in His behaviour, in His words, and in His actions, those views and sentiments regarding the subjects that most perplex me, which, if I could but attain the same, would give me, at the least, composure. While I approach Him—even this 'Jesus, Son of David,' thronged by the multitude, I see Him as one who is conscious of all

conditions and states of being—visible and invisible—the past, the present, and the future:—the present and the visible must in His view keep their proportion, as related to the unseen and the eternal.

It is certain that it is not insensibility—it is not insensitiveness of temperament, whence springs the serenity of that brow, and the governed calm of that countenance. But then, may it not be that, in the depths of that unfathomable soul, wherein the weal of all creatures is entertained, no regard is had to those ills and pains of an hour or a day, the witnessing of which moves me to pity, and disturbs my peace? If I might be tempted to think so, then I follow the course of this Saviour of the world, and note what is the quality and the intention of His miracles, from the first of them to the last. Now in this series there occur not more, at the most, than two or three exceptions to the rule, that they were interpositions, having for their purpose the relief of bodily sufferings, or the supply of bodily wants.—They were (with these few exceptions) just such acts of spontaneous sympathy as my own feelings would prompt me to imitate, every day, if I could, when mingling with the concourse of crowded cities. In this sense we may reverse the Scripture, and say, 'the mind that is in me was also in Christ Jesus.' There was in Him compassion on a level with the most ordinary of the ills that affect humanity. It was not that, to Him before whose eye the immortality of the thousands around Him was laid open, their present pains—their lameness and palsy, their blindness and deafness, their hunger and their thirst and weariness, were of small

or no account. It was not that a forethought of the boundless future bred in Him a lofty indifference toward pains and ills so ephemeral as those that weigh upon mortality. Viewed on this ground, and in relation to the inference which I have now in view, the series of evangelic miracles carries with it a peremptory conclusion. The case before us is one in which the less involves the greater. It is certain that HE who knows, and who has in His view all that I see and know, and far more, and whose emotions of pity are like my own—yet are far more acute, and uniform —has also in His view such facts, or such prospects as are more than sufficient for the double purpose, *first* of securing an habitual composure and tranquillity, and *then* for holding entire an unshaken loyalty toward God —the Sovereign Creator and Ruler of the universe.

If now the question be put to me, whether my Christian Belief enables me to rid myself of that burden of far-reaching care and trouble which I share with the thoughtful of all ages—my reply is this—In truth I have not found the means of ridding myself of this burden; but in the Gospels I have found HIM in communion with whom I am learning how to bear it; and thus I hope to bear it to the end, still retaining my faith and trust in God as supremely Good and Wise—'a Just God, and a Saviour.'

THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE ARGUMENT CONCERNING CHRISTIANITY: ERNEST RÉNAN.

IT is one thing to inquire concerning the present position of an argument, in a strict sense, and another thing to give a reply to an indefinite question relating to the variations of religious opinion, thereto relating, within this or that community at a particular time. The first-named inquiry is logically distinct; and it may admit of a single and a categorical reply: the other is likely to receive contradictory answers; and yet each may be true in a sense, or true in part. The reply to the first question, if rightly given, will be peremptory and conclusive; and moreover it will carry with it a consequence or an inference, bearing upon what ought to be the next following step in the same direction. A reply to the second will indicate consequences that are precarious, and which may or may not be realised:—in such case—no one can say yea or nay—confidently.

As for instance—the present position of the argument concerning Christianity is such—if the mere reason of the case in hand is to prevail—that it can admit of only one further step. But even if, in the strictest logic, a conclusion finally in favour of our Christian Belief

should be admitted, it will by no means follow as an inevitable consequence, that a people—the people of Germany, or of France, or of England—shall therefore yield itself to what is admitted to be the reasonable issue. This is far from being a necessary result. Influences that are always rife, and always in active operation, may avail, as heretofore has happened several times in the course of ages, to bring about a condition of national, and almost universal Atheism. We, on the Christian side, are too ready to assume as certain what is in fact exceedingly doubtful—namely this—that a Christianized community will always and for ever hold to its profession—because in reason it ought to do so.

The actual mood of the public mind toward Christianity at any particular time is very much the consequence of the influence of individual popular writers—who may sway the literate classes, this way and that, for a season: it is a to-and-fro movement—it is a hot and a cold fit, which intermits from year to year. Not so—AN ARGUMENT concerning a mass of facts. In the conduct and the issues of a great argument no such variations of the public mind can rightfully have any place. THE ARGUMENT has its own stages:—it has its slow developments, and its crises, and it will have its issue in a determinate manner. We shall see this in making a report of a notable recent instance.

Fits of national unbelief, with an Atheistic chill following, or attending them, are likely to arise among an imperfectly instructed and a much-reading people from various causes, but especially from this, that the controversy between Christian and antichristian writers has

lately come to the surface in an inverted order. This mistake in method is attributable, quite as much to the ill-directed zeal of the Believing, as to the astuteness of the Unbelieving combatants. On both sides a groundless hypothesis concerning the conditions of a *written Revelation* has been assumed, as if it needed no proof. When we reject this hypothesis, then a vast mass of argumentation—learned and proper in its place—ceases to take any bearing; or it takes only an indirect bearing upon the question of Christianity, as affecting ourselves now, and in the future life.

It is a very natural prejudice that prompts us to imagine that a Revelation—in the form of *a written message from above*—ought, as to its literary quality, and as to the conditions under which it comes into our hands, to conform itself to certain notions of fitness, and propriety, and exactness, that seem due to its heavenly origin. This prejudice—it is nothing better than a prejudice—assumes all forms among our religious communions:—with those who are the least well informed it exists as an absurd superstition, attaching itself to the Authorized Version, and even to the spellings of our English Bible: with those who are a little better informed this superstition has taken up the Textus Receptus as its rock, or its anchor ground: then comes the more erudite critical doctrine in support of which volumes upon volumes of learned apology are every year issuing from the Press.

But what becomes of this same pious hypothesis in behalf of Holy Scripture—the Book of God—when we place it alongside of our religious interpretations of the great book of the material world, and when we look

about upon the Universe, considered as God's creation? We know in how dark and comfortless a mood the Oriental mind—from the earliest ages to the present time, has continued to peruse the book of nature—presented to it as the product of infinite Goodness, Wisdom, and Power. The Oriental sage affirms that the animal orders are not—cannot be, from God—"the Eternal Father;" but are the work of the demiurge—a being of inferior attributes, and doubtful beneficence. In like manner among ourselves, the ways of the Almighty are discussed and *criticised* in a mood of gloomy perplexity, on the ground of an hypothesis which, in fact, is wholly gratuitous, and which is the product of a theology that is itself factitious. A time must come when suppositions which already have given way in their imagined bearing upon the material world, shall also cease to take effect upon Biblical Interpretation. When this time shall have fully come, Unbelief will have lost its occasion, and apologistic criticism will have lost its importance.

I have just now said that the subjects of debate in the Christian argument have come to the surface in an inverted order. In an instance such as that of the Christian argument, the logical order which the subjects in debate should obey, is plainly this.—In the first place it is to be asked—Are the principal facts on the reality of which everything rests real, or not so?—Are the allegations concerning them true or false? If they are mainly true, then this conclusion carries in itself all that we need much care about as to the documents wherein the alleged facts are reported. But if, on the contrary, the principal allegations are untrue, then a

laborious discussion concerning the literary merits, and the age, and the authorship of the writings will barely repay the pains of those who take it in hand:—such a discussion will be consigned, by the busy world, to the care of the few who abound in leisure and in learning.

If we are sincere—if our motives are approvable in entering upon this great argument, then we shall remand to a future hearing, and shall put off to a convenient season, all evidences for and against the hypothesis that the documents in our hands—to wit—the Gospels and Epistles, are of Divine origin, and are therefore authoritative in a religious sense. This done, and the ground cleared—we take in hand the purely historic problem which relates to the truth of the facts alleged. Whether the writings which report these facts were divinely inspired, or were simply human products—this is an after question.

We take up the argument therefore in this, its proper and reasonable order, as to the subordination of subjects. Let it be assumed then that we have done with questions concerning the Inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures in detail. We have done, therefore, with piles of books and pamphlets on the one side—samples as they are of frivolous and malignant criticism, intended to impugn and destroy popular beliefs concerning the Bible. We have done also, on the other side, with the groundless anxieties of those—learned and ingenious writers—who have come forward to maintain this popular faith. The truth of the facts is all we need think about at this time. And now if we inquire concerning the present position of the Great Christian Argument

relating to the truth of the Evangelic Facts, we are excused from the necessity of calling into court the band of Christian advocates; inasmuch as we have at hand evidence that is more available than this: we have before us, in series, the succession of Antichristian advocates, and we may at this moment listen to the conclusive and most pertinent testimony of the last and the best of them, who, as from a vantage ground, and himself personally endowed with the highest qualifications fitting him for the task, at once passes sentence upon his predecessors—one and all—on the same side, and gives expression to what must be—if itself be inadmissible—a final effort on that side to solve the problem of historical Christianity.

Of each of the several suppositions that have been resorted to in recent times for solving the problem of historic Christianity, this is true of it—that it rejects and finally disposes of its immediate precursor, and by implication it contradicts its penultimate precursor. Thus it was that the base-born and ill-considered ribaldry of the Voltaire era met its refutation from the pens of the German Rationalists, who admitted, for the most part, the honest intention of the Evangelists, and accepted the reality of the history—*minus*—the miracles. But the insufficiency of this mode of disposing of the supernatural element was soon felt, and by many it was acknowledged; and at length a formal and elaborate refutation of the theory was undertaken, and ably executed by Dr. Strauss. This acute and accomplished writer—thoroughly master of his materials—advanced step by step, and at every step held up Rationalism to scorn.

A better hypothesis than that of the Rationalists must, he said, be devised. The mythic origin of the Gospels, and the Idealistic uprise of Christianity, was therefore brought forward to supplant Rationalism, and to fill the chasm which the removal of it had occasioned.

But this same chasm quickly yawned anew—The "myth" was pronounced to be—an impracticable scheme. A substitute for this also must therefore be found, and we now have it in the recent volume of M. Ernest Rénan. Yet again the same law of demolition takes effect, as before. The mythic origination of the Gospels is first formally rejected by M. Rénan, and the historic reality of THE PERSON of Christ is amply admitted; and much more than this is granted, as we shall see. Nevertheless, while the enterprise upon which Strauss had expended so much labour, is peremptorily declared to be futile—to be nugatory and inapplicable, the ingenious author of the scheme receives from his accomplished and courteous headsman a due acknowledgment of his personal merits. So it is that the man in black, who wields the fatal axe in front of the block, says to his kneeling victim—'Forgive me the stroke—I have no malice toward you in my heart.'*

Each of these instances, in its turn, supplies an illustration of what must be the course of things, under the

* "La critique de détail des textes évangéliques, en particulier, a été faite par M. Strauss d'une manière qui laisse peu à désirer. Bien que M. Strauss se soit trompé dans sa théorie sur la rédaction des évangiles, et que son livre ait, selon moi, le tort de se tenir beaucoup trop sur le terrain théologique, et trop peu sur le terrain historique."—*Vie de Jésus*: Introduction, p. viii.

circumstances; and this peculiarity of the Antichristian argument deserves, at this moment, peculiar attention. In any imaginable instance if the case be of this sort—namely—That a difficult problem, whether historical or physical, is propounded, and a solution of it is attempted by *opposed parties*—each reasoning upon the ground of a foregone conclusion, then, when argumentation has proceeded some way, the final issue will *indicate itself*—on this side, or on that, a while before it is openly recognised:—as thus.—Be it that the two opposed conclusions are absolutely contradictory, the one of the other, so that—if *this* be true—*that* must be false. On the one side it will be seen that those who take up the argument in succession move on toward an issue in the way of a gradual approximation:—each reasoner, in his turn, brings forward a hypothetical solution which is substantially an advance upon that of his immediate predecessor:—at least it is an approach—it is an amendment—it does not overthrow, or flatly contradict what has gone before;—but it improves upon it, and disengages the hypothesis from some perplexing anomaly. Thus each of these reasoners nears the true issue as by the method of "exhaustions." Every page, almost, of the history of our modern physical science offers an instance which might be brought forward to exemplify this averment.

On the opposite side—the side of those who are labouring to make good the contrary conclusion—the course of argumentation will be this—The reasoners on this opposite side come forward, each in his turn—each, in commending his own hypothesis, speaks of it as *a new* conjecture—which rests its claims to be listened to upon

the plea of the admitted failure and falsity of all preceding schemes. Each advocate presents himself in a confident manner, and turning round to those *on his own side*, who have already shot their arrow and missed the mark, says—"You too have misapprehended the problem before us.—You also are quite wrong. We must, on our side, go to work anew." The issue of an argument which has thus given a premonition of its nugatory and delusive quality, will be to show that *all* have indeed been wrong—and the last speaker not less wrong than his predecessors.

So we find it at this very moment: the Great Argument is still at issue concerning Christianity. The accomplished writer—whom I have named—M. Ernest Rénan, brings the problem forward on ground which is indeed new, on the Antichristian side; or it is new as to the large admissions which he makes—and which he makes with cordial feeling, on behalf of the Evangelic history. But then these admissions—made in this mood—must not win a hearing from us until we have consented to reject, and have actually put out of view, whole and entire, the myth hypothesis of Strauss. Thus it was that Strauss, in his turn, had given the *coup de grace* to the Rationalists:—he had treated them with scorn and derision: he had said—"You are altogether wrong—You have mistaken the facts—The Gospel is not a reality in any historic sense—it is nothing but a myth." So did the Rationalists, in their day, rebuke their precursors—the frivolous and ignorant revilers of Christ. Destruction and contradiction—administered freely to those *on their own side*, is the law—it is the logical

characteristic of the Antichristian Argument. And such will be its issue—and this issue awaits it, near at hand. A course of argument—pertinaciously adhered to in the desperate endeavour to establish a false position, takes effect, by *retroversion*, upon the methods of reasoning which have thus been misused. The logician who utterly fails in his argument, breaks or blunts his own tools.

Those on the Christian side who have already noted this characteristic of the Antichristian Argument, and have therefore looked out in expectation of what must be its next turn, may well rejoice—nay, they may exult in seeing that, in taking this necessitated turn, the movement has fallen into such hands as those of this learned, eloquent, and seriously-minded writer. Nothing more auspicious—on the Christian side—could have been thought of than is this which has actually occurred. M. Ernest Rénan is the man who possesses those qualities as to his personal dispositions, and his reputation, and his accomplishments, that should fit him for the task which he has now achieved. This task is of a twofold kind; for, it is *first*, that of 'reporting progress'—or rather, no progress—on the Antichristian side; and *secondly*, it is that of giving the highest possible advantage to his own hypothesis concerning the PERSON—l'homme incomparable—of the Evangelic history; nothing less ample than this hypothesis could now—as he thinks—be admitted with any chance of success. From this time forward, therefore, no writer—unless it be some one of the lowest grade in literature—will refuse to grant, at least *as much* as this intelligent and learned

writer has now explicitly granted. There is then an end of the Antichristian Argument—so far as Ernest Rénan has disallowed the grounds of it. Unbelief, if it is dated earlier than the publication of this book—the 'Vie de Jésus,' has died by the hand of an accomplished conspirator.

But the hypothesis of M. Rénan—if it be taken along with his concessions and his admissions—cannot be thought of as if it might be a final issue in the argument concerning Christianity. A scheme of this sort—fantastic as it is, and wholly gratuitous—not only asks to be carried out to its natural consequences; but it demands, from its contriver, to be set clear of the contradictions which it so largely imbeds, and to be stripped of its poetry also, which is an impertinence. The concessions of the '*Vie de Jésus*'—incompatible as they are, one with another—are these.—

The first of them—embracing whatever it implies, but does not specify—is, the *historic reality* of—'la personne sublime du fondateur'—the author of the new religion. This leading concession is amplified in many passages of eloquent eulogium, and of beautiful description. The personal history is granted, not as with sullen reluctance, but readily, and it is expanded, and it is vindicated, and its outline is filled in with much vivid colouring: What becomes then of Dr. Strauss, and of the unreal mythic Christ?

The second of these concessions gives us back the antiquity, and the substantial authenticity of the four Gospels—by whomsoever they were actually written, or in whatsoever manner they were put together, in their

present form (*Introduction*, xvi. and onward). The writers —it is affirmed—were either eye-witnesses of the acts of Christ, or they embodied in their narratives authentic original memoirs. This affirmation, at large, is applied specifically to each of the Evangelists; and the critical grounds on which it rests are briefly stated in the course of the Author's INTRODUCTION. These critical grounds of belief in the Evangelic documents it is not important to my argument to repeat. It is enough that, after setting off the miracles, we are told that we tread solid ground in listening to the Four Gospels! It is enough that—'les évangiles, sans cesser d'être en partie légendaires, prennent une haute valeur, puisqu'ils nous font remonter au demi-siècle qui suivit la mort de Jésus, et même, dans deux cas, aux temoins oculaires de ses actions.' These admissions help us therefore to sweep the field of vast heaps of futile argumentation; and it is evident that we are now drawing on towards a conclusion—whether on this side, or on that.

M. Rénan, in giving a résumé of his criticism of the four Evangelists, repeats the expression of his confidence in them, as substantially trustworthy narrators of what they saw—although, as to each, it is on grounds peculiar to each:—'En somme, j'admets comme authentique les quatre évangiles canoniques.' Matthew, he says, is unrivalled in reporting the discourses of Christ. The Gospel of Mark—revised by Peter, is, in an historic sense, of more firm texture:—it is the most ancient, and the most original. This Gospel abounds with those minute notices in matters of fact—i. e. visible events—which, without doubt, indicate an eye-witness. It is in this

precision, as to facts, that we recognise the consenting testimony of Peter—who had followed Jesus from first to last. Luke, in M. Rénan's opinion, is to be listened to with more caution—more reserve; but it is certain that in compiling this, which is a regular biography of Christ, he had under his eye some original documents, which have been lost; but which contained facts and discourses unknown to the two—Matthew and Mark. The Gospel of John is, as M. Rénan thinks, of ambiguous authority; nevertheless his Gospel contains passages of high and unquestionable authenticity.*

It will be for those who, on the Antichristian side, shall follow this writer's steps, in the mode of a severe criticism, to show that what he here accepts as real in the rise of Christianity, contradicts and disallows the hypothesis which he labours to uphold. The bone of Unbelief, ill set by M. Rénan, must be broken anew; nevertheless he will have had the merit of calling forth, on the side of material Atheism, a future Goliath of loftier stature and of hoarser voice, and that will not now, be slow to come. Meantime why should we, on the Christian side, endeavour to drive this candid worshipper of the prophet of Galilee across the lines of belief, or insist that he should take his place on the Antichristian side? Why should this be done—inasmuch as twenty passages might be cited from this 'Vie de Jésus' in which the author gives expression to a

* It may be well to note M. Rénan's rejection, absolute, of the Apocryphal Gospels—unworthy, as he thinks, of a moment's comparison with the Four:—they add to these nothing that can be accepted as of any value. (INTRODUCTION, p. xliii.)

sincere and ungrudging admiration of one of whom, in the last lines of his book, he says—whatever may be the future in human history, 'Jésus ne sera pas surpassé. Son culte se rajeunira sans cesse: sa légende provoquera des larmes sans fin: ses souffrances attendriront les meilleurs cœurs; tous les siècles proclameront qu'entre les fils des hommes, il n'en est pas né de plus grand que Jésus.'

This 'sublime personne,' says M. Rénan, who presides every day even now over the destinies of the world, may properly be called divine. The author has exhausted the resources of panegyric in his book. What more then, on the side of Belief, do we ask for? What more can we in reason demand? What we ask is this—That there should be some fitness or congruity in the encomium as related to the historic subject of it. As it is, M. Rénan's glowing commendation of the hero of his romance reaches the utmost pitch of absurdity in its grotesque disagreement with the historic characteristics of the real Evangelic PERSON. Put now out of view the problem of the supernatural, which the author evades, and this 'Vie de Jésus' will stand as a signal instance of failure in the line of those whose genius has seduced them into the attempt to work a fable out of a history:—a fable—true in the shell, utterly false in the substance.

Are there any among us—on the Christian side—who would wish to see a formal refutation of this illusory book? The best refutation of it is that which it receives in a moment when an ingenuous reader, in closing it, opens one of the Gospels—let it be that one to which

M. Rénan affixes his special authentication. The feeling of revulsion and disgust is irresistible.—On every page of this pretended 'Life of Jesus,' there is an utter misconception of the facts, and of the mind and meaning of the whole; and most so, of the mind of Christ. What is to be complained of is not any malignant mis-statement of the facts; but it is a strange—one might say, a burlesqued misconception of them. An instance analogous to this may give some aid in rightfully and candidly interpreting M. Rénan's innocent bewilderment. Take the case of an intelligent Hindoo or Persian, who visits England—his note-book in hand:—the foreigner has access daily to the home and the office of a public person concerning whose character and acts he wishes to inform, first himself, and then his countrymen, on his return. He is veracious, and keen sighted, and observant. But look now into the diary of this Oriental.—You will find everything there to be at once quite true in a sense, and utterly false also: everything is recognisably exact in the outward form, yet—everything is absurdly—it is ludicrously out of position. This Oriental goes about mis-interpreting whatever he sees and hears, not so much because he is ignorant of our usages, as because the motives—the conventional reasons—the moral instincts, and the higher and more refined consciousness of the English gentleman and statesman are of a sort of which the Hindoo or the Persian has not even a remote conception. It is thus that M. Rénan, on every page, misconceives *Him* whom he vaguely designates as the—personne sublime—the founder of Christianity.

Misconceptions of this species—bewilderments in fact—do not admit of rectification:—the book therefore is safe from refutation—it will continue to be devoured by uneasy disbelievers. It will never again be spoken of after the day when the next voice, on that side, shall have uttered its thunder.

It can be no amazement, on the Christian side, to find that the CHRIST of the Evangelic history has been so strangely misunderstood by a writer who, while he has the genuine documents of Christianity full in his view, and diligently read, yet fails to see, or to apprehend at all those foremost principles that are the main characteristics of what he calls—'a religion for mankind.' One might think that a prominent rudiment of the Christian system is—The doctrine of an after life—even the immortality of *the individual man*, and an inheritance for him in the heavens. One might think that Christ's often-uttered answer to the urgent question—'Is there forgiveness of sins with God?' could not have escaped the notice of a reader of the Gospels—even of the most careless reader. One might have supposed that the renovation of the moral and spiritual life in the individual believer, would not fail to present itself as a prominent article in the preaching of Christ and of his Apostles. Nevertheless of none of these principal matters does this learned and industrious writer appear to have obtained even a remote conception, as if it had a place in the public ministry of Christ. The question here is not, whether these doctrines or principles are true, or illusory; but this only—were they not included in Christ's teaching? did

they not stand foremost in his own view of the objects of his mission? Who can doubt it that has read the four Gospels, or one of them only? Not a line in this 'Vie de Jésus' gives evidence on behalf of the Author that he himself has any sort of consciousness of things spiritual —the life of the soul toward God. I will not here be put off with a taunt—'You are using the Evangelic slang—we know the sound of it.' From such a judgment I appeal to the catholic consciousness of the Christian community in all times.—There *is* a life of the individual soul toward God:—there is a beginning of this spiritual life in repentance—faith—love, and the hope of eternal life.—There is an individual spiritual life to teach, and to give effect to which, CHRIST lived, died, and rose again; but of none of these things does this writer know even the rudiments. He may reject the supernatural if he pleases:—he may think it enough to underline a half of the Gospels with his vapid and inane phrase—la légende dit. He may stare at the problem which he does not attempt to solve; but there is a heavier charge outstanding against him—for he wholly fails to apprehend the first principles of the Christianity that was given to the world by Christ.

M. Rénan finds in the preaching of Christ nothing more substantial, or nothing which should claim to be reported of in a life of the Author of a new religion—nothing better than a sentimental communism, or an amended Buddhism. This 'kingdom of heaven,' so far as this writer has been able to gather its import from the four Gospels, is in fact a kingdom for earth, not for heaven:—it is peace on earth, and harmony and liberty

of thought and liberty of action, for the individual man, and for nations. As to the personal immortality which the Gospel promises, it is—the Buddhist eternity of collective human nature. Thus it is that this writer is content to dismiss in silence the deep yearnings of the individual soul for a life divine:—it is thus that he puts contempt upon the instinctive apprehension of a future retribution:—it is thus that, in his estimation, the universal belief, the hope, the fear, of a world unseen, and an individual life beyond death, together with —"la légende" concerning miracles, and the supernatural, they may safely be set off from the four Gospels. But then he says—there is nothing great in history that does not rest upon fable—'une légende.' In such cases it is not so much the actors in the fraud that are to be blamed; 'c'est l'humanité qui veut être trompée.'

This mode of solving the difficult problem of Christianity will not—it does not now—give contentment to clear-headed men on the Antichristian side. Such persons, who perhaps are popular writers, may quietly allow M. Rénan's romance to have its day, and to be retailed in the twopenny literature of the time; but they themselves well know that this accomplished writer has in fact brought the great argument, on their side, into a position of extreme difficulty. Never again will it be possible for them, or for their successors, to resort to random averments, that are indefinite and cloudy, about myths, or Oriental idealism, or what not. Antichristian leaders will grudge to see themselves thus forcibly dragged forward into a position where they can neither recede, nor advance. How is it in fact?—this

fact is most noticeable, and I ask attention to it—The Antichristian company, headed at this time by so able a spokesman as Ernest Rénan, is led up to that 'Place of a skull' where a band of Roman soldiers is doing its wonted part upon three who are condemned to die by crucifixion. According to the now-authenticated report of a witness, the mid-sufferer is heard to exclaim as He dies—'O Père, je remets mon esprit entre tes mains.' This is not enough. This leader of the Antichristian band is not willing so soon and so easily to dismiss his friends, whom he has summoned to the spot. He demands their presence even to the latest twilight of that Friday. He insists that they shall wait upon the ground an hour or more until Joseph of Ha-ramathaim has had time to confer with Pilate; and moreover until Nicodemus, another 'visionary,' has been able to purchase and to bring forward 'une ample provision des substances nécessaires à l'embaumement.' These witnesses, under the guidance of M. Rénan, and not only they, but we all—willing and unwilling—are required to assist at the burial—we all are to become qualified, along with the first 'eye-witnesses,' to give evidence as to the important fact that, when the mangled body had been laid upon the table of stone within the vault, the door of the sepulchre was closed—'par une pierre très-difficile à manier.' Night has come on; and we may all retire!—History has nothing more to say concerning the Crucified Prophet! What became of the body is not known—and can never be known, so thinks the author of this romance.

Who shall stay the pen of the incautious and ill-judg-

ing author of the 'Vie de Jésus?' Manifestly he has here written a paragraph too much, or a page too little. He has thrown a complication of difficulties in the way of those whose resolution is fixed—never to grant the supernatural. These difficulties should now be spread out to view, that we may better understand the arduous task of those who must encounter them. A few words will here suffice.—In two, three, or more places of this attractive volume, M. Rénan gives utterance to his opinion of the moral and the intellectual qualities of the four Evangelists—or, as he would say—of their *artistic* individual ability as writers. He greatly admires their simplicity; he accepts their manifest literary incompetency, which, in the best way, vouches for their truthfulness as reporters of what they had seen. These four writers, or certainly three of them, were not the men who could have imagined or invented such a life as is that of their Master, or who could have framed discourses so divine as are those which they have recorded. Let us hear him on this matter.—I will not take the responsibility of putting into my own words a passage, the far-reaching inference from which might lose something of its value in any translation. M. Rénan (p. 451) speaks of the painful fall which the reader is conscious of in passing from the history of Jesus (the original memoirs) to the history or the writings of his Apostles. 'Les évangelistes eux-mêmes, qui nous ont légué l'image de Jésus, sont si fort au dessous de celui dont ils parlent que sans cesse ils le défigurent, faute d'atteindre à sa hauteur. Leurs écrits sont pleins d'erreurs et de contresens. On sent à chaque ligne un discours d'une beauté divine fixé par des

rédacteurs qui ne le comprennent pas, et qui substituent leurs propres idées à celles qu'ils ne saissisent qu'à demi. En somme, le caractère de Jésus, loin d'avoir été embelli par ses biographes, a été diminué par eux. La critique, pour le retrover tel qu'il fut, a besoin d'écarter une série de méprises, provenant de la médiocrité d'ésprit des disciples. Ceux-ci l'ont peint comme ils le concevaient, et souvent, en croyant l'agrandir, l'ont en réalité amoindri.'

Passages of the same import, relating to the intellectual mediocrity and the literary inefficiency of the Evangelists, might be cited from several of the chapters of this volume. The upshot is this—that, in the opinion of so experienced a critic as M. Rénan, the Evangelists, apart from their Exemplar, were quite powerless:—far from being able to work in the same style—their original apart—they blunder and misunderstand everything the moment when they are tempted to step off from the *terra firma* of facts and realities. M. Rénan is very positive on this point. Away from their Master, or an inch only out of sight of Him—these four writers do not fail to show themselves what they are—namely—visionaries, and low in their mode of thinking—rightly were they spoken of by the chiefs of the Sanhedrim, as not only unlearned, but 'idiotic' Galileans.

So let us take it. But if it be so, and we are willing, on the Christian side, at this time, to grant it, then a startling question presents itself; and we are inclined to press for an answer to it:—an answer it must be, out-spoken, intelligible, special, and carried forward in its particulars. We have just now been present in the

garden, where was a sepulchre. We have witnessed the entombment of the crucified body. We have seen a heavy stone rolled up to the mouth of the tomb; and, as to what afterwards became of the body, no one knows:—the facts are lost to history. Certain it is that there was no resurrection.

Whence then have come the closing paragraphs of the four Gospels?

These closing paragraphs are thoroughly in the style of the body of the Gospels—of each Gospel separately. There is the same simplicity, there is the same archaic majesty—the same dignity—the dignity of guileless truth:—there is the same avoidance of passion, and of exultation, and the same absence of fanciful amplifications.

That even *one* of these four writers should have hit the Evangelic style, in this case, is a supposition that is in the very highest degree improbable. The improbability is increased incalculably if we must suppose two to have done this.—What does the improbability amount to if the conditions of our argument are not to be satisfied with anything less prodigious than the supposition that the four Evangelists—and each in his own manner—should have concluded their Gospels in the manner in which they have closed them? This is a supposition which no well-constituted mind will admit—or not until after it has sustained fatal damage by obdurate adherence to a glaring sophism.

Upon this writer's own showing there are therefore now no grounds for rejecting the closing paragraph of the four Gospels. These final passages, in which the

behaviour and the utterances of Christ carry the marks of genuineness with peculiar distinctness, could not have been written at all, otherwise than—as truthful records of what the four writers had actually seen and heard. If there be reality anywhere in the Gospels, there is reality here. Strong indeed must that infatuation be which forbids the author of this book frankly to acknowledge what *his own principles of criticism* clearly imply.

M. Ernest Rénan will not fail to hear of this incoherence and this inconsistency from chiefs of his own party, more logical than himself. Some of them will tell him that there is now only one way of escape from the embarrassment into which his enthusiasm, his genius, and his taste for the picturesque, have betrayed him and themselves. He will be told—and told truly—that those who refuse to accept the supernatural in a sense divine, must be driven into the acknowledgment of it in a sense infernal.

It will not be asked of a writer on the Christian side that he should put forth a programme of the impiety that is next to come. I decline to do this; but I think that those who have watched the progress of the Atheistic argument during the last twenty years would not find it difficult to foreshow what must be the next-coming utterance of it. We may be sure that an awful Nemesis takes effect on occasions of this kind, serious as they are: there is a retributive delusion which has already come upon many among us who are fondly clinging to the phantom of an easy Christianity that shall offer them—a faith, void of hope, and exempt also

from fear, for the world unseen: they themselves—bereft of immortality, and of the last glimmer of Belief.

Things will not come to their rest at this point. Many at this moment are flinging themselves into the arms of a writer who, by his sophisms, and the graces of his style, has come in as an angel of light to rescue them from the dreaded conviction that, after all, this Christianity may be true, and that, in passing into the world unseen, it shall prove itself so. The prediction may be risked that these fond admirers of Ernest Rénan will soon hear that he is scoffed at by bolder spirits on his own side. Some of these will avenge upon him the ill turn he has done them in this Life of Jesus. A consciousness that the Atheistic cause has been betrayed in this instance, will compel its chiefs to give utterance to their last adventure for solving the problem of miracles. Unbelief has but a step now to take upon its destined circle, and it will come round to its starting point. The reader may find this, if he please, in the Evangelic record, Matt. xii. 24, Mark iii. 24, and in the parallel passages in Luke.

THE END.

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